

Learning My Way – finding your own path through the world

Marc Cleiren – July 2020 – information for prospective students

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The Why and What of *Learning My Way*

Students are faced with an inherent paradox: in this phase of life they want to widen their horizons but they also have to choose specific educational tracks and their future profession as soon as possible. This dilemma translates into choice overload, stress, anxiety, and depression. In addition, nowadays we lead multiple, parallel lives, where studying, social contacts, online activities and work exist side-by-side as separate ‘bubbles’ with very few connections between them. This leads to fluctuating motivation levels, delay in completing studies and also drop-out. Given the COVID-19 situation and the professional insecurity this entails regarding the exterior future, interior anchoring of motives and choice have become imperative for autonomy during and post educational trajectories. It is quite rare for study programmes to cover the topic of developing your own future vision based on personal and professional identity. Many students therefore suffer insufficient personal anchoring of their own vision and commitment. This makes professional development an expensive labyrinth of trial-and-error, where students often learn the hard way what is (and isn’t) right for them, and have more experiences of failure than necessary. To deal with this we designed the *Learning My Way* approach. The mission of *Learning My Way* is:

- To help students find a flexible learning path that leads them towards realising their unique contribution to the world;
- To support students in becoming healthy and engaged professionals in both life and work, who are able to deal autonomously with setbacks and uncertainty in all areas of life.



International and Dutch Honours students during Seminar I in non-COVID times.

(March 2018, photo: M. Cleiren)

Learning My Way (LMW) aims to help students become the owners and designers of their own path in both their academic career and in life in general. Assisted by smart ICT and seamlessly integrated intensive seminars, participants learn to develop ownership in navigating to autonomous motives, forming a future vision, and recognising their own talent and pitfalls. Charts help illustrate an individual's development over time. The blended approach combines intensive individual work with larger group sessions.

Learning My Way is constantly developing. With innovation grants and research linked to these grants, we currently deepen and broaden the LMW approach and are implementing it a.o. in the Ba and Ma curriculum of Leiden University, TU Delft and Utrecht University.

With *Learning My Way*, students explore, anchor and monitor their own professional and personal development over time. This is encouraged by means of an inventive combination of provocative questions posed during (online) preparation, 360-degree feedback from the student's own social circle, and processing of findings during intensive seminars, which also incorporate intensive peer interaction and reflection. The students additionally record their own competence development online, and charts are used to compare this development with their self-chosen professional and personal future vision.

Learning My Way: educational approach

Learning My Way (LMW) is an award winning innovative approach that uses an intensive form of hybrid, blended learning with *online* or *on campus* live seminars, with clear pre- and post-session portfolio tasks. This reinforces the reflective process, as well as activates students to apply acquired insights in their own learning and social environment. The LMW intervention generally comprises three to five face-to-face seminars and individual coaching contact. Seminars are preceded by an Online Preparation assignment (*OnlinePre*: reflection on yourself) sometimes followed by a Transfer assignment (*Transfer*: implementation of the learned insights in concrete activities) and finally an Online Integration assignment (*OnlineInt*: consolidation of the learned insights). Students upload their results before and after each seminar. Seminars themselves combine various interactive methods, including break-outs for individual reflection (*Time-ins*) and interaction in pairs or larger subgroups (*Time-outs*).

The LMW intervention has a modular structure with a developmental sequence. From 2020, five base modules are available that are selected and combined according to the needs of the specific educational context:

1. Module I: ***Personal & professional purpose***
 - a. OnlinePre1: Puzzling on Purpose; CompetenceSliders
 - b. Seminar1: Identification of Core Purpose (Filling in diagram in-seminar)
 - c. Transfer1: Own competences in the wild (CompetenceSliders instrument)
 - d. OnlineInt1: Upload competences and record of Core Purpose diagram
 - e. Individual coaching session
2. Module II: ***Conflicting Motives***
 - a. OnlinePre2: Buddy invitation (online 360-degree feedback); VSNU Competences (delta)
 - b. Seminar2: Conflicting motives: talents and debilitating patterns
 - c. Transfer2: Buddy interview & talent/ observation in the wild
 - d. OnlineInt2: Upload buddy interview & talent observation
3. Module III: ***The Learning Quest***
 - a. Seminar3: Taking ownership of learning
 - b. Transfer3: Undertaking learning & vision quest (exercises).
 - c. OnlineInt3: Upload harvest of learning & vision quests



4. Module IV: **Commitment**

- a. Seminar4: Commitment as a multiple yes; how to commit; choosing a witness
- b. OnlineInt4: Upload SMART commitment with buddy picture
- c. Transfer4: Exercise free will (exercising in the wild)
- d. OnlineInt4: Upload experiences with exercises, report commitment outcomes.

5. Module V: **Harvesting knowledge & achievements & Vision of the future**

- a. Seminar5: Present and future: Future Self and future plans
- b. OnlineInt5: Upload Future Selfie, future briefing
- c. Individual coaching session (optional)

All LMW instruments are based on *state-of-the-art* educational insights and have been developed specifically for this approach. For instance: the *CompetenceSliders* instrument allows students to evaluate themselves (or be evaluated by 'buddies') by means of 'sliders' on the 32 competences in the classification used nationwide by the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU) for all academic and non-academic professions, thus offering a nationally accepted definition and categorisation of competences. The VSNU system can also be replaced with other skills and competence-categorizations. *Puzzling on Purpose* is an open online questionnaire tool used for reflecting on the most central motives and ideals in one's own life. By exploring these issues, students will arrive at a provisional ranking, which is produced during the first seminar and can be consulted later via the LMW system with an option to update their views.

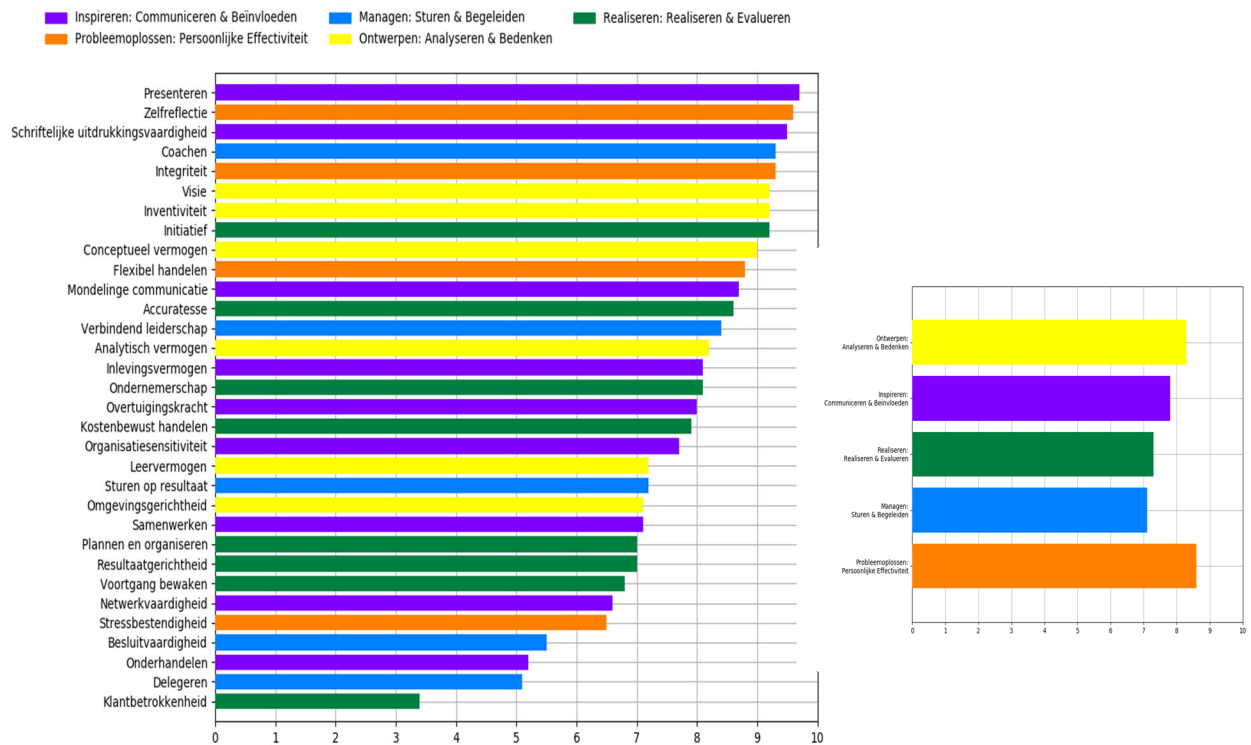
An online modular workbook supports the LMW blended learning trajectories. It contains theoretical substantiation for the assignments and acquired insights. The *Learning My Way 2.0* ICT environment accommodates the personal online portfolio. This contains not only the chronology of the student's own insights and assignments but also the peer feedback, personalised profile scores (i.e. Competence score development) and the student's personal reflection on the course.

Basic to the LMW system is that students themselves obtain and retain ownership of their own learning track. The set of instruments focuses on self-reflection and development (intrapersonal). LMW is expressly not designed for comparative and competitive use. This means that students can reflect and communicate honestly (validly) about their own situation without social desirability influences or masking for reasons of social norms, grades or competition. The LMW ICT application is GDPR- (AVG) proof. Students themselves determine explicitly whether and/or when data are disclosed to third parties.

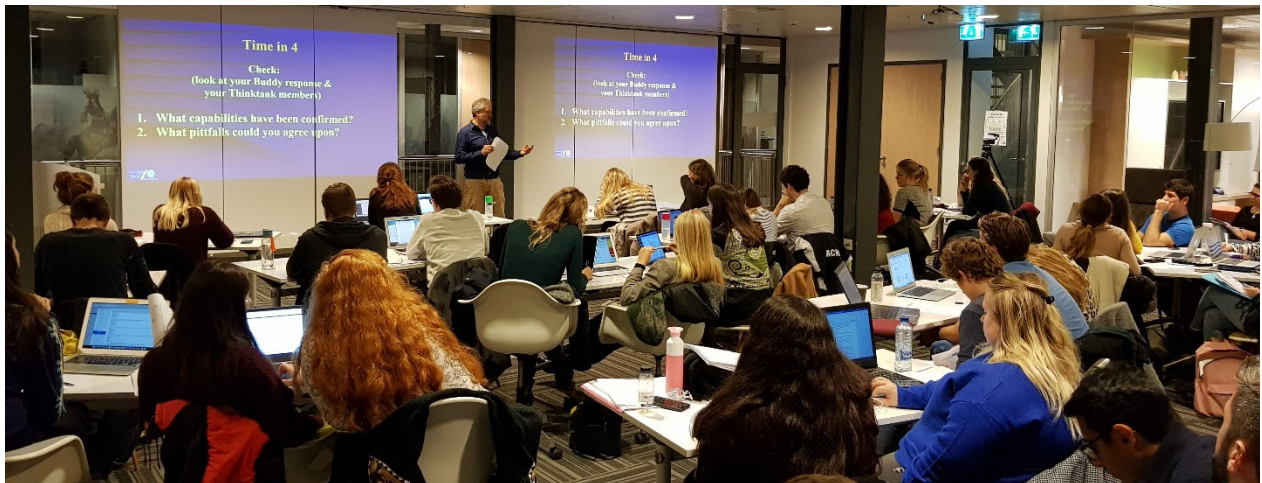
Learning My Way: different settings

Over the past five years, *Learning My Way* has been tested in multiple contexts. and are currently implemented as part of the regular curriculum in different Ma and Ba trajectories. *Learning My Way* is destined to become widely used in higher education in both research universities and universities of applied sciences, as well as in secondary education. Learning My Way is integral part of 2.5 year the Honours College programme at FSW, the Hague Pre-University College, and the Ba3 curriculum of Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology. It is also implemented at TU Delft, University Utrecht, and in the Ba and Ma phase of studies at the Leiden University Faculty of Law.

Learning My Way trajectories come in different forms, depending on the function in a curriculum: it may be integrated as a co-curricular mentor system, or delivered as interspersed block-trainings (3 – 20 week trajectories), or even one- or two day seminars.



Example of charts generated by the LMW system, showing the competence profile and cluster scores, as reported to the individual student.



*Example of a Time-in during Seminar II, international students Honours College. Individual self-reflection on the basis of an earlier buddy interview (viewed online).
 (Photo November 2018: Justin Sijtsma)*

How do participants experience *Learning My Way*?

Student evaluations of the seminars and trajectory are usually highly positive (on average around 4 out of 5), with an particularly high score given for relevance (usually around 4.5 on average). Also, hybrid online versions (since March 2020) have been highly appreciated, with student appreciation across the board averaging over 8.0.

"The structure of the teaching was very good. The alternation between listening and being busy yourself worked very well. I found it difficult to fill in the purpose diagram at the beginning, but it got better once you got started. The discussions with fellow students were also very helpful."

Law student, Leiden University 2018

"I look back on a valuable day. A pity that we had to do this online, but your enthusiasm made it easy to keep your attention. Thank you!"

Professional in one-day seminar
Utrecht School of Business & Organization - Utrecht University 2020

"I was very pleased I got to know myself a lot better in several areas. I am very happy with the way the seminars were given: approachable and informal. The coaching conversation was also very useful to me."

Law student, Leiden University, 2019

"I think the Dragon and Talent approach is great and really made me think about myself in a different way. By this I mean I often try to not think about my patterns and things that make me uncomfortable. Through these exercises, I was able to not only pinpoint my patterns but also how to address them and use them."

Honours student, Leiden University 2019

"Learning My Way has given me many insights."

pupil of Pre-University College, The Hague, 2020

For more information:
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