

**Kari Murto**

# **LEADING THE PROCESS**

**TOWARDS THE PROCESS CENTERED  
DEVELOPING OF WORK COMMUNITY**

# **LEADING THE PROCESS. TOWARDS THE PROCESS CENTERED DEVELOPING OF WORK COMMUNITY**

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[kari.murto@sya.fi](mailto:kari.murto@sya.fi)  
[www.sya.fi](http://www.sya.fi)

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**FOR ANNUKKA AND MIIKKA**

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

Each one of us wants to work in a good work community. A good work community gives support, motivates and gives strength even in difficult working conditions. A bad work community deprives motivation and strength that otherwise could be used for working and for developing one's work. A good work community can be described for instance with the help of communal self-esteem. The self-esteem of an individual reveals how much he trusts himself in different situations and how well can utilize his personal resources to cope with the demands made upon him by the environment.

Communal self-esteem correspondingly reveals how well the community members recognize the various needs of the community as needs, hopes and expectations of the community, groups and individuals. Moreover, communal self-esteem tells about the members' feelings towards the community: do they feel comfortable in the community, do they identify with the fates of the community, with its successes and failure. Do they feel pride or shame for belonging to the community.

Belonging to a work or study community respected by oneself and by others increases an individual's self-esteem whereas belonging to a community with poor appreciation may threaten or decrease it. Even personal failures like failing in an exam can be compensated by emphasizing the standards of the school or university (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992).

The prerequisite for good self-esteem is that each member has a realistic idea of what the community expects of him and of others, and that the members have a chance to express their feelings, needs and thoughts connected to the community. The materialization of these prerequisites in the daily life of the community lay a foundation for a sense of solidarity, for realistic communal self-knowledge and for responsible action. If an individual is not able to respect, or feels that others don't respect his work community, he can actively try to strive for heightening the

appreciation of his community, or he can change jobs, and if that is not possible, he can console himself with the thought that things are much worse in another community (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Communal self-esteem is a quality that can to a great extent be perceived by feelings, but is hard to measure. Luhtanen and Crocker (1992) have developed a meter for communal self-esteem, but everyone can make a quick estimate of his own community by considering the following questions:

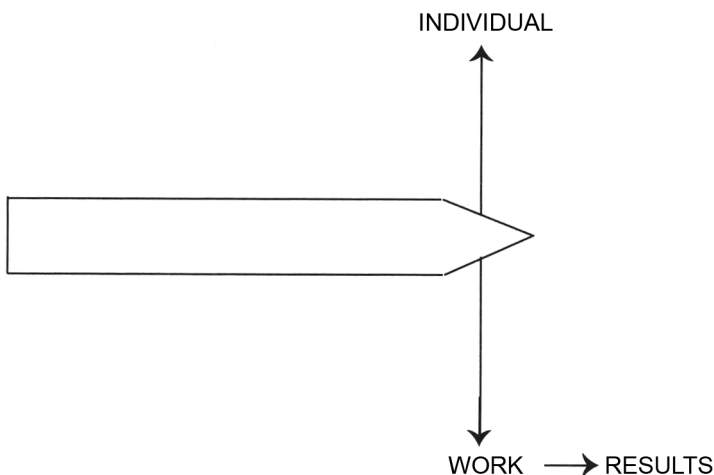
- What kind of mood am I in when I go to work?
- Do I feel welcome at the working place?
- Do my superiors and colleagues appreciate my work?
- How do I think that my own occupational category is appreciated in my work community?
- What do I think that other units or companies in the same line think about my work community?
- How do equality and justice materialize in my work community?
- Am I familiar with the financial situation and future prospects of my organization and work community?
- What are my chances to influence my work and my work community?

As an example of a bad work community and its effects I shall quote a description of a Finnish insurance company by Katriina Perkka-Jortikka (1992, 116):

“Keeping back information and the exercise of power connected to it, had in a contradictory way something to do with the system of control in the community. Statistics were kept because the superiors did not trust the clerical employees. Especially the division heads did not give information, because they did not want the clerical staff to know “too much”, for knowledge is power. The superiors talked about things only to those employees they trusted. It was up to the activity of the employees how they were able to cope with this “Wild West”. There were no alternatives, people did not know what else to do so they surrendered to rivalry. And all unfairness, hardness and distrust was masked under seemingly polite, nice and clean, but busy clerical work, in an important service organization with quality responsibility. The

clerical employees themselves had to use their activity, enthusiasm and lives to stand all this and to cope with it, and they even saw their own important meanings in their action. But the strength for logical collective control of things or even common understanding was in that reality beyond their strength ...”.

The work community can be described as the intervening variable between the worker and his work. At its best it supports, encourages and inspires, at its worst alienates and discourages its members.



**Figure 1. The work community transmits the individual's relation to work.**

In a bad community human resources are wasted to mutual tensions, unresolved conflicts and distrust. Disappointments and frustrations are unloaded in groups of trusted workmates, which generates cliques, and destroys community's atmosphere. While a bad community takes peoples' energy away from work, good work community and atmosphere gives energy to community members, helps them cope, supports the motivation and learning.

The working community and its atmosphere have decisive impact on the qualitative and quantitative results of the work.

The working community is not only a physical and social entity. The most important community is a subjective community in the minds of the community members, their unique understanding of the working community, and their own position in the communities' hierarchy. If one feels not being respected or trusted professionally, it weakens his or her commitment to work and undermines his or her work motivation.

Persons' subjective perceptions are not created at random. The man's position in a community seems to have an impact on his perception. The top managers seem to experience their organization or community more positive than their staff whatever is being asked (concerning communication, career development, atmosphere, incentive systems etc) in the organization surveys. The goal of organization development should be everybody's wellbeing and a positive attitude towards the organization and community.

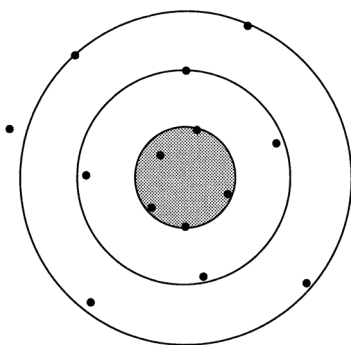
I shall not draw a line between the concepts community and organization because they overlap to a great extent. I see organization as an official system, the size of which can vary a great deal. Within a large organization there can be several work communities, but an organization in its entirety cannot always be called a community. As opposed to the membership of an official organization, the membership of a community may be impossible to define precisely. Without trying to define the concept of community unambiguously and extensively, I do associate at least the following elements with it:

1. The members know each other well and have an opportunity to relatively regular, personal interaction.
2. A sense of solidarity so that the members themselves and most of the other members are somewhat unanimous in their perception of who belongs to the community and who doesn't.
3. From the standpoint of the community's basic task, the members have sufficiently common social reality



in essential questions.

4. We can discern circles in communities in accordance to how tightly the members belong to the community. A community can naturally have even several core groups. This is illustrated in the following figure.



**Figure 2. The core group of a community and the members gathered around it.**

The innermost circle stands for the core group of a community the members of which are in intense interaction with each other and share the largest amount of common social reality. Situated on the outermost circle are the borderline cases, who identify themselves poorly with the community or whom the majority of the members don't perceive as belonging to the community. People's location on the circles can be very shifting. During certain periods of time someone is a part of the core group, but can shift to the outer circle for example due to a removal or a crisis in the community and vice versa.

A community and a clique differ from each other in the fact that a community has got common objectives and norms with the larger organization or community. The objectives and norms of a clique deviate from or are even contrary to the ones of the surrounding community.

The objective of this book is to portray a development strategy for communities that would in the best possible way support the development of a work communi-

ty so, that it would become community conscious, that it would establish a strong communal self-esteem, and that it would support and encourage its members. A community like this also has got the best chances to implement its basic task.