

Kari Murto

LEADING THE PROCESS

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

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DEVELOPING OF WORK
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FOR ANNUKKA AND MIIKKA

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6. DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNAL SELF-ESTEEM AND IDENTITY

When we discuss and solve the problems of everyday life together, when we agree on common rules and principles of actions, and when we make plans and set goals, gradually the members start to form a common view of the community, of its strengths and weaknesses, of the basic task as well as of mutual relations and of the division of tasks. This kind of a common view of the community and its state can be considered a result of the development of communal identity. I have in my former works (Kaipio & Murto, 1980, 15-16; Murto, 1991, 17-18) described the development of an educational community from the standpoint of social norms and the quality of interaction, when we were able to discern four levels of communal development:

- I An incoherent group with no common norms or goals.
- II Outwardly coherent community.
- III A social community.
- IV Community-educational community.

Moving from the first level to the fourth required regular meetings of the whole community, assembling at least once a week for three to four years. Especially during the first two years the meetings could assemble daily. The central features in the community's development from one level to the next were

- increasing communication between the charges and the educators,
- gradual growing of mutual trust,
- learning a common language and finding common norms and goals,
- rise of the community's self-esteem and requirements for both the charges' and the educators' actions,

- dramatic improvement of educational results.
(Kaipio, 1977; Kaipio & Murto, 1980).

Based on experiences from various communities, I shall in the following try to describe the development stages of communal identity, whose central features seem to repeat themselves in very different kinds of communities. The most central area of communal identity is the amount of common social reality. The more incoherent the community is, the less common social reality is shared by its members. A community without an identity, a defiant community, and a community with identity describe certain kinds of ideal types between which most communities can be placed.

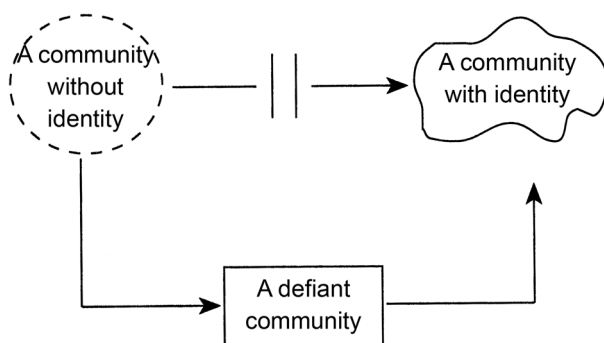


Figure 20. The development of a community's identity goes towards the community with identity often through a defiant, introvert stage.

A community without identity

A community without identity normally does have some kind of a physical identity like a room or a building, where it is situated at, and a relatively permanent membership. Instead, the social identity is very weak since there are few common discussions and little common time.

The common view of the community's goals and basic task is vague, the sense of solidarity is weak, and the staff has a detached and estranged attitude towards its work. They are physically present at work, but their hearts and

thoughts are far away. Each one of them tends to use the time and resources at work chiefly to their own selfish purposes. One takes care of the finance and membership matters of his sports club during working hours using the employer's telephone, the other uses the company car and time to transport building materials to his summer cottage that is under construction, someone else looks for a new house in the newspaper advertisements at the working place and makes phone calls for more information on them.

There are not necessarily bigger open conflicts in the community, because the staff's mutual communication is rather superficial and it sticks to practical matters. With the aid of cliques and speaking behind backs they let out the things that have caused irritation. It is a part of the established and unexpressed culture that each one is equally allowed to take care of their own affairs at the employer's cost. Only excessive selfishness causes grudge!

A community like this is controlled from the outside, and safe and carefree from the point of view of the management: it will not stand up to resist any undertakings if they do not threaten the members' own interests. It is adaptable and easy to manipulate. The superior of the unit is the only one who has, in accordance to his position, some kind of overall responsibility for meeting the forms of bureaucracy, for writing the reports and for having enough personnel at work. The turnover of the personnel does not very much sway the community, whose communal limits, self-knowledge and sense of solidarity are weak. It is enough to manage from one day to the other. The real results of actions are naturally very modest, but if we assess them with superficial and performance-centered criteria, the community is usually not different from other respective ones. It may be wise to emphasize that I am now referring to units and communities in the public administration, and it is hard to measure their results objectively.

A defiant community

From the stage of having no identity, communities do not seem to develop straight into communities with an iden-

tity. According to my experiences, their development seems to through a stage of defiance as if resembling an individual's development phases.

The defiant development stage is reached through the increase of common meetings and discussions. The change can be launched by a change of a superior or personnel. Temporary defiance and resistance can occur in any community due to requirements and pressures from outside without any change of personnel, but then we are not dealing with long-range development.

Regular and adequately frequent gatherings form a forum, where people can together consider the state of their unit, their work, their mutual relations, division of tasks, and the basic task of the community. Gradually they become able to solve problems and conflicts that trouble the community, and to conquer the difficulties they meet in their work, which strengthen the sense of solidarity give faith and confidence in one's own abilities and chances. Work starts to feel more interesting and to occupy people's minds even in leisure time. In a community without identity the personnel think about their personal things at work, whereas a defiant community is characterized by the fact that people also take their work affairs home in a positive sense. When the sense of solidarity starts to grow stronger, it is often not enough to meet during working hours, but the staff wants to spend time together and to talk about their work also on their own time. When in a community without identity the personnel's actions are controlled by pursuing one's own interest, in a defiant community the interest of the unit comes first and own interest only after that.

How should we call a community like this that is bubbling with enthusiasm, and that has found and identified with a certain (treatment, education, or action) ideology, defiant? Seen from the outside, the community looks clannish, because its interest is primarily limited to its inner affairs: human relations, problems, ideology of actions, and development of inner structure. These issues are not easy to solve, and therefore take a considerable amount of energy from the community members. Defi-

ance and self-centeredness shows in the community's attitudes towards the environment, like the other units and the management, that is automatically expected to exhibit attention and gratitude. Objectively thinking, the expectations are fully justified considering the personnel's manifold contribution, as compared to earlier times, to their work and community.

Inside the community people are very aware of their own achievements, but they avoid communicating them actively to outsiders. That is what we Finns would consider as shameful self-praise. The fact that the community's inner processes are exhausting, and that the members have feelings of inferiority or fears that they will not be understood, leads to neglecting the relations to the outside world. The bureaucracy of public administration often fails to notice positive 'deviation', and that is why the community's achievements remain unnoticed until the community, due to its improved self-esteem, starts to show outwardly active and critical. Confidence in own expertise, desire to become independent and to control one's own limit can cause envy in the parallel units: what right do those have to choose their personnel, inhabitants, students or patients?

Before long the word of the unit reaches the management that is not equal to the occasion, and tries in the name of 'impartiality' or its authority to return the unit to the rank. Communities that have experimented with alternative pedagogy, treatment systems, or functional model, have regrettably often got into conflicts with the administration and/or authorities that represent traditional tendencies, and they have been fully destroyed regardless of their achievement. To avoid destruction would require more open and active relations to the outside, to the management and to other units.

Openness towards the outside and towards feedback that comes from the outside might save a developing community also from the dangers of apparent communality. When a community goes into examining and interpreting its inner processes, it can experience enlightenment and self-sufficiency, when it becomes blind to

its own community dynamics. Phenomena that are always lurking, are splitting the causes of problems and of 'all evil', and placing them outside the community: to the management, administration, or other units. Organizations often give these kinds of projections or projective identifications even realistic impetus. A part of apparent communality is suppressing individual differences and divergent opinions, especially if they criticize the community. They are taboos that you are not allowed to talk about, but it is also not allowed to talk about these 'talking prohibitions'!

In order to secure development towards a community with an identity, it would be appropriate to have community supervision from an outsider - it could reveal the pitfalls connected to outside relations and the inner dynamics of these communities.

A community with identity

A community with an identity knows its weaknesses and strengths. Goals, principles and practices of actions have been internalized, and the communal culture is established so far, that the community does not have to guard its limits as inflexibly and stiffly as a defiant community. The community members have a very strong and expansive feeling of responsibility. They do not feel responsible only for their own unit, but for the whole organization and, at best, for their whole line of activities. If the interests of the unity require, the unit is able to be flexible, but trusting its expertise it is also able to set its limits quite firmly if necessary.

The community makes high demands on itself and on its environment. It is active and accustomed to taking stands. Self-confidence shows in its ability to give critical feedback to other units and to the management, and in the facility to receive criticism of its own actions. The community is open on the inside and to the outside. It supports the open communication between its members and it can handle its conflicts and problems. Even though it is the duty of each member to adhere to common agreements, the community is tolerant and supports individual-

ism and diversity.

A community with an identity is by no means without problems and conflicts, but its members have courage, ability and skill to handle the difficulties they meet with, and they also have, based on experience, a confidence in getting over them.

Everyone feels comfortable with the ways and courses of action that have been sought to solve problems that are felt common, and committing to them is not a problem. If unanimity cannot be reached in important issues concerning the community, the issue is tabled rather than put to the vote, if the situation is not compelling. Voting can scatter rather than strengthen a developing community.

Successes in solving problems and overcoming difficulties strengthen communal self-confidence and lead to setting more demanding goals. Thus goals **rise from the communal process, from below**. Also mistakes and failures are shared, and their examination can be used as a source for learning.

The collective experience basis that gradually develops as a result of discussions and open communication, creates a firm foundation for a community that is becoming solid from below and setting goals independently.

The rise of communal self-esteem expresses itself also in the **rising of the level of goals**. More demanding goals that have been set from below, act as challenges and bring the development of the community forward just as the spikes of a mountain climber help him towards the top of the mountain (figure 21).

The level of communal
development

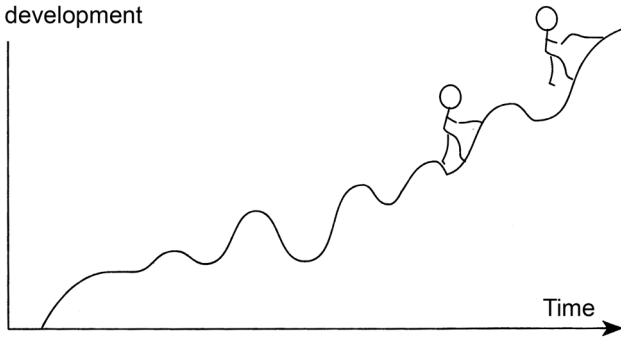


Figure 21. When the communal self-esteem grows, the community sets more demanding goals to itself, that in turn bring the development of the community forward just like a mountain climber climbs with his spikes and rope up the mountainside.

In the development of a community with an identity, the role of the manager or the superior of a unit is decisive. By means of his authorization, he has to be able to organize the cooperation forums and to support open interaction and communication: to lead a process. Based on everything that has been said so far, it has probably become clear that we are not dealing with an easy, quick and uncomplicated task. The most common “mistakes” in the development projects of work communities are the management’s and/or personnel’s expectations of quick results. Changes require time and patience. People have to be given time to learn. That is why we have to proceed with small steps.