

Kari Murto

LEADING THE PROCESS

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

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DEVELOPING OF WORK
COMMUNITY

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Koulutuskeskus oy

FOR ANNUKKA AND MIIKKA

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4. THE PROCESS CENTERED DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY OF A COMMUNITY

4.1. Starting points and principles

The emphasis of process centered development lies in studying the everyday life of a community on all of its levels. A community should primarily be developed **from below upwards**, because the main task of both public administration and organizations of the private sector is to respond to the needs of their clients. Were the clients school children, health care patients, nursery school children or customers of a social welfare office, it is always the staff working on the basic level that has the best expertise in knowing their needs. For an organization or a work community to really be led by the needs of its clientele, and to be able to respond to them, listening to the basic level staff and guaranteeing them a chance to influence are the essential prerequisites for succeeding.

However, it is clear that not all the knowledge and experience needed in a community has accumulated in the basic level only. The success of a community requires utilization of the views, knowledge and experiences of all its members, the leadership, superiors and workers. That is why it is essential in development and in daily actions to see the overall situation of the community and the advantage of wholeness. The second principle in process centered development is thus **holism**. We can, of course, state that all models for organization development are holistic. In Management by Objectives, for instance, holism is realized so that all levels and sectors are surveyed in a programmed manner according to a plan that the management has worked out beforehand. In Process Centered development holism means continuous interaction between

the various units and hierarchy levels in the whole community. The starting point is always an open situation, where the objectives of the whole community are worked up by fitting together the objectives and wishes of the various units and the management. The same applies for strategies as well. Process Centered Development is by no means action without objectives. But both the objectives and the strategies are under constant surveillance and treatment, and the whole community takes part in it.

4.2. Applying Process Centered Development into practice

It is typical for the development of both an individual and a community, that when new skills and practices have proved useful, they are established as habits and routines that we are not necessarily even conscious of. The longer and better a routine has worked, the more difficult it is to give it up, even if circumstances should change and routinized action were ineffective or even harmful (cp. Kortteinen, 1992). Kimmo Kevätsalo (1992) notes that employers and a trade union kept to established routines even at the expense of financial profit:

“...the management’s possible attempts for change are conveyed very poorly to the factory floors. On the other hand, the trade union is hardly striving for any changes in the work organization.

... ..

Both parties are loosing and are fully content with the situation.

Both could do better, but they prefer to go on as before. The traditional thinking patterns that guide the actions are even stronger than pursuing financial profit in the long run.”

On each individual work community level the established and security promoting routines go on from day to day unless serious conflicts or crises arise.

Not only an individual, but also a community has to stop to think the lived and the done, when it is no more possible to go on as before. Individual crises could, for

instance, be death in the family, a divorce, the burning down of one's home, or becoming unemployed. Economic recession, organizational changes, or crises within the community may force the community to stop and to clear the situation and find new solutions together, often with the help of an outside expert. According to the survey at a supervisor training seminar by Risto Hynynen (1992), economic recession has forced the work communities in social welfare and health care fields to reconsider the crux of their work, and to adjust the division of tasks, and to try new working methods.

But is crisis the only way for an individual or a community to learn and to develop? What is it that in normal conditions hinders conscious and regular stopping and examining together one's own work, the state of the work community and its everyday life?

4.2.1. Examining the everyday life

As was stated above, the starting point of process centered development is examining the everyday life of the community. The examination is carried out by the community members themselves. The most important examination method is discussion both while working and in meetings and conferences specially arranged for that purpose. This may sound simple. After harsh experiences, facing the realities, the most advanced business managers even in Finland gradually start to step down from their heights and managers' mutual circles towards the foundation of production, the everyday life on the floor level. As an example Jorma Ollila, the former CEO of Nokia, whose interview in Suomen Kuvalehti of April 30, 1992 is partly quoted below:

"I don't believe in slogans. The world changes so fast that declarations and slogans very quickly go out of date. ...

I find it important, that each central business defines its know how factors, and knows how to form them into competition factors in order to make money with them. ...

This is much more trivial than any solemn declaration. Concepts and strategies often simplify matters, they cover up the everyday life.

Important customers do not ask for declarations. They want to visit the factory, they want to see how it is lead, what kind of people lead it, what is essential in product development. The questions are commonplace. ...

This is about going back to basic issues, to the fact that every oak has been an acorn. ...A diligent and well motivated person does ten times, maybe a hundred times more (in brainwork/K.M.) than a badly motivated and organized person.

...

How you motivate him to make profit is tremendously interesting. It does not come about through declarations, it requires you to go to the factory floor and talk to people.

I think it is far more important than for instance talking to reporters.”

Examining everyday life together with the staff is talking to people on the “floor level”, but it is not **only** walking and talking when you meet with individuals and groups. Regularly organized meetings and conferences, where the community meets to deliberate together questions concerning their work and work community, are necessary.

Discussion and talking are two different things. Most of us have learned to talk in our second year. The sense of hearing is an inborn ability. Community development, however, calls for **open** talking and **responsible** listening. For most people this is not a problem as long as the group is small enough and the people reliable. Problems start to arise only when you should talk as openly in the presence of the whole work community, and when you should also listen to those people of whom you already know what they are going to say, and when you should even listen to them who you don't think have anything reasonable to say or who always make resistance! How often does it happen in large company meetings, that it is the same 20 % of the participants that talk, and the other 80 % are passive or, at the most, whisper to their pals during the meetings. This is, unfortunately, the case with most nov-

ice or otherwise incoherent communities.

Setting aside common time for discussions is difficult for many reasons. Laying off personnel, which has only been augmented by the recession, has increased the staff's amount of work. Everyone can immediately say what he could do with the time used for the meetings, but it is much harder to see and to believe in the good that common meetings and conferences can bring along. The faith is hardly strengthened by the first common meetings, where most people may sit without uttering a single word, and even the most active lot is divided into defenders and oppose of the meetings. The situation is suggestive of a former postman, who complained his haste because of a long route and had therefore no time to learn how to ride a bike. Well, he did once try, but since he happened to fall, he figured that the riding skill would be of no use anyhow. The responsibility of arranging and developing meetings and conferences lies in the beginning almost completely on the faith, skill and perseverance of the manager or the superior.

What should we then talk about? Everything concerning work and the work community. People in training often ask, whether home affairs belong to work. When they oppress or delight us strongly, they will come to work whether we want it or not. That is why talking about them should not be avoided, even though the work community is not the staff's therapy community. However, it would be good, if the community had a therapeutic effect that could support the members' self esteem. Reciprocally work matters end up at home as burdens of the family members the more often the less there is room and chances to talk about them in the work community. Unfortunately bringing home worries from work does not develop the work community.

In common meetings all matters brought up by the community members should be discussed: the good and the bad sides of work and the work community, successes and failures, positive relationships and disagreements, the past and the future. Traditionally it is the manager or the superior that draws up the agendas, and the staff has a

chance to bring up their matters in the section “other matters”. If the meetings are meant to create a **means to develop the community**, then all members of the community should have a chance to bring the matters they are interested in to common discussion. It has proved useful to have at an agreed place a conference notebook where anyone can immediately write down the matter he wants to be dealt with in the common meeting. Decisions can also be recorded in the notebook, when they will remain and anyone can read them at any time. At the same time the notebook becomes a “diary” or a “chronicle” of the community, where you can afterwards track the community’s development in all its stages.

Another tricky question is how often it is necessary to have unit or community meetings. A couple of meetings a year will do to fulfill the requirements of industrial democracy, but they are of no remarkable importance from the point of view of community development. In principle, the more frequent the meetings are, the more effective means of community development they will become. In the Dingleton Hospital therapeutic community developed by Maxwell Jones (1982) in the 1960’s, the staff and the patients gather daily to a common meeting that lasts approximately an hour. These meetings are attended by 50 - 100 people (in the recent years the number of patients has been fairly small), who after 30 years of experience really openly discuss all matters concerning the hospital. In Finland there is very little experience of meetings in institutions of the corresponding size. Meetings for the whole community or administration have hardly been arranged at all. Whenever a meeting is summoned, it is an information meeting arranged by the management.

The Central Finland federation of municipalities for social affairs started in the late 1980’s meetings for the whole district, at first a few times a year. Motivated by positive experiences the leadership together with the staff has seen it necessary to have meetings more frequently. It is remarkable that the meetings that take place in the central institution are attended by representatives from other institutions around the county of Central Finland. It is

significant that the attenders are not always the same representatives of work communities, since that would turn the meetings into traditional forums of representative democracy, where knowledge, skill and power conglomerate on a small group of people.