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LEADING THE PROCESS

TOWARDS THE PROCESS CENTERED DEVELOPING OF WORK COMMUNITY

FOR ANNUKKA AND MIIKKA

CONTENTS

4.2.2. Living and learning

In the course of technological development it often seems as if people identified with the machines they work with. A machine is effective, because it runs continuously at maximum revolutions. It seems that modern man is expected to do the same: to be quick and to be continuously on the move.

The rationalization of working life has aimed at and by far succeeded in the elimination of unnecessary movements and pauses, and has thus reduced the use of expensive labor. That is why those who remain are in a hurry. Work often allows only minimal brakes, and there is hardly time for conversation between the workers. Undeniably, the action does seem effective.

The effectiveness of work can not, however, be estimated by the amount of haste. Through haste it is possible to move towards objectives in the direction of the basic task, or away from them. That is why there has to be time to stop and examine together where you are, what you are doing and how, and what is achieved and what is not. Let us for a while consider a farmer driving at full throttle with his tractor. He drives so fast that he cannot look back every now and then. Even if he were able to turn the field quickly, the result will not necessarily be acceptable. But it will not bother the farmer as long as he has no time to discover that. However, the truth will come out at harvest time at the latest.

Maxwell Jones (1968, 1976) called learning through the everyday life of a work community 'living and learning', and later on 'social learning'. Because of the extensive use of the concept social learning I will rather use here the concept living and learning. It requires regular stopping and studying what has been done and lived through.
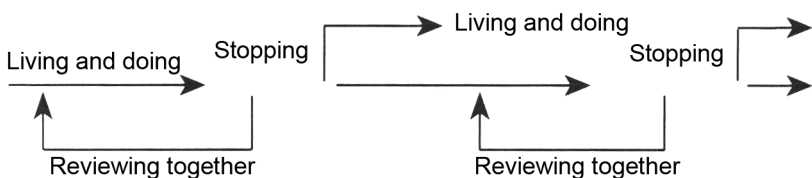
Figure 4. "Model" for living and learning, where lived and done are continuously reviewed together through discussions and which provides the basis for the direction of coming actions.

It is possible to describe self-regulating organizational learning, often called double-looped learning through the model of living and learning (Morgan,1986; Argyris et al, 1985).

The starting point in the traditional organization development thinking is a survey of the community's present state usually done by questionnaires and/or interviews. Based on the outcome, the most central problems and development needs are located. Another part of the strategy of action research is that the survey results are given to the community's disposal. After the consultant has presented the results, the community members choose the development areas and consider means of development. This is often done in small groups. Afterwards the groups' achievements are summoned, and the community members together agree upon practical development measures, people in charge, schedules and follow-up. Many development projects follow the development of the community's state with the help of annual situation surveys.

This kind of a survey – planning – realization – follow up -model is slow and does not function in swiftly changing circumstances. It does help to bring up problems, but the strategy is inadequate in creating a high standard community that can effectively solve problems. That is why it has quite often happened that the community has used up it resources already at the stage of considering the results and the means. There has not been enough consensus and energy to carry them out. The initial enthusiasm and great expectations turn into collective dis-

appointment. The results of change strategies that have been planned in advance and programmed to be carried out in stages, have even in the light of research turned out weaker than had been expected (Beer & Walton, 1987).

According to study results, change does not comply with plans that have been worked out in advance. McLean et al (1982, 87-89) have found following weaknesses in the change strategies that have been planned in advance:

> 1. The functional model (agreement – gathering information – analysis – giving feedback) does not produce enough information from the point of view of action, and leads to gathering additional information.
> 2. The training scheme, meant to precede the change, becomes detached from the objectives, and instead of being a means it turns into an end in itself.
> 3. The control group of change becomes involved in analyzing its own processes, and fails to carry out its actual task and problem solving.

Schlessinger and Ostry (1984) as well as Jick and Ashkenaskin (1985) emphasize the fact that in order to bring about long term changes you have to start with little changes, the success in which should be connected to a wider change in systems and structures. This approach is very close to the idea of the process centered development strategy, where the basis of change is constant examination of the staff's everyday life and experiences. To link up little changes with wider connections requires, however, that the staff has an updated overall view of the organization, i.e. common social reality.

To stop constantly and regularly to discuss together what has been done and lived through means **constant self-evaluation and change** for the community. Traditionally evaluation and planning have been detached as separate activities that should establish the basis for change and development. In process centered development, systematic and wide-ranging evaluation of the community's state and its results is an important instru-

ment for change **follow-up**, but it is not adequate enough to maintain the process of change nor to direct it continuously.

Companies that go on to result responsibility emphasize the meaning of setting the objectives and planning expressly in view of the control needs of the administration and the leadership, but from the point of view of internal development of communities the most important factor is that all members of the community together examine their own actions. For example in schools, teachers and students assess their own community, their learning results, and together plan and decide on matters that concern their work and their community. External assessment studies give each unit essential feedback of their rating in relation to other schools on various dimensions.

External assessments can hardly change the concrete interaction and atmosphere between the teacher and the student group, which, however, are crucial from the point of view of learning results and motivation. It is hard to imagine how for instance an index of students' responsibility assessed through questionnaires could help the teacher or the students to grow in responsibility. But if the community has got time to agree on the division of tasks and on common rules, and to handle their violations and neglects, then the processes of assessment and education are organically connected in the community's everyday life and serve the basic task of school education (Kaipio, 1977; Kaipio and Murto, 1980).

In the examination of everyday life carried out together, the action - what has been done and lived through - is evaluated in relation to the **basic task** of the community. In the whirls of societal change each organization has to define its basic task over and over again: Why does our community exist? Whom should it serve and how? In relation to our basic task, are we doing the right things in the right way? How does the course of action and the functional structure that we follow help the realization of our basic task?

In addition to evaluation, the process centered development strategy also approaches **planning** from a new point

of view. Traditionally planning in communities and organizations has been a part of the leadership's tasks. Normally the management decides on the annual objectives and outlines the strategies to achieve them. After that they are introduced to lower superiors and the staff, who can tell their opinions of them. For practical action, the responsibility areas are divided and the follow up methods and schedules are agreed upon.

The shift over to result responsibility has led also the public administration communities to act as described above. It is, of course, positive if the staff two or three times a year thinks over its work, objectives and results. But from the point of view of community development it is not enough to achieve real changes. At worst you can end up with a dispassionate ritual that is **performed** on account of an external demand. People pretend to develop, but instead of enthusiasm most of them experience boredom and alienation.

Planning itself can be inspiring. The management or the staff can reach very impressive common visions, especially if the environment is comfortable and far from the place of work. But this means looking at the future only, and the forgotten daily grind strikes back the minute you should move from visions and strengthened will over to concrete action. **In the process centered development strategy you move from the concrete over to the abstract, from today's reality into tomorrow with the aid of yesterday's experiences**. Wider, long term visions and objectives will arise and formulate gradually as the communal self esteem grows. The continual, regular participation in examining one's own and the others' actions - the lived and the done - will gradually cause each member of the staff to **commit him- or herself to common objectives and courses of action**.

Developing one's own actions

The model for living and learning can also be applied to the development of an individual's own actions. In practise this could be done for instance by writing a diary of one's work. We have used the diary as a part of training

on both leaders and nursing staff. Even though learning this kind of a line of action has proved difficult, the ones that have succeeded in it have reported only positive experiences.

To end a working day by writing down in free form his or her experiences and feelings helps the individual to take distance to the lived and the done, when it is easy for him or her to see

– on what kind of things he/she spends his/her time and how his/her time employment responds to his/her idea of his/her basic task or

– what kind of things have proved difficult or problematic, and how he/she copes or tries to cope with them.

A leader, a teacher, a nurse, as anyone of us will at some point get into a conflict situation. In such a case we usually act - quite unnoticed - according to certain routines that we have learned in our early years. If the end result is what we expected, we don't have to stop to think over our line of action. But if we experience failures, we either stop to analyze those situations, or reject them, and try to explain them to ourselves the best we can, and thus deprive ourselves the chance to learn.

If keeping a regular diary seems insuperably difficult, another effective way to learn from your own experiences and to develop your work is to write about, and thus to analyze, problem situations and emotions connected to them. This kind of analysis provides the basis for trying out and evaluating new kinds of courses of action.

Alan Mumford's (1991) study on management practices showed that managers are concerned solely of making profit. They attach learning to training which is often carried out as an undertaking detached from the everyday life. They see learning from one's work and experiences as the most important source of learning, but in most cases it turns out to be a haphazard side product of making profit. However, one of the best ways to increase the profit is to consciously pay attention to one's own learning. One of the managers told that in the mornings he

thinks over and writes down what he wants to achieve during the day or what his aims are in the day's meetings. In the evening he estimates how well he has succeeded, and what was the share of his own contribution and that of the others.

Mumford sees this kind of learning as the best since it makes it possible to attach learning consciously and systematically to everyday activities. It is possible to intensify learning by seeing situations confronted at work or outside work as learning situations, by evaluating them afterwards alone or together with work mates, and by making conclusions of them for the future.