LEADING THE PROCESS

TOWARDS THE PROCESS CENTERED DEVELOPING OF WORK COMMUNITY
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DEVELOPING OF WORK
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4.2.5. Creating open forums for decision-making

To fulfill the lack of common social reality between the decision-makers and the executors, Anton Makarenko and Maxwell Jones, both independent of each other, developed a same kind of solution: open forums for decision-making (Murto, 1991, 177-178).

Traditionally both private and public administration organizations have emphasized the limits of exercising power. With a special earnestness they have kept guard over the issue, who is allowed and who has the right to participate in, for instance, the meetings of the management or the board of directors, who is allowed to make proposals in them and who is not. In recent years there has been, now and again even heated discussion of the right of the staff’s representatives to attend meetings of the decision-making bodies.

Giving information of decisions or matters in preparation is seen as a question of power: who is allowed to give information, and of what matters, inside and outside the organization. The public administration has had the practise not to give information of matters in preparation, even though the municipal law already has a different content. As the basis of planning, statements are asked from chosen interest groups. Decisions prepared like this are often followed by a spiral of complaints, which may slow down the execution of the decisions and raise their costs. This kind of emphasis on hierarchism and the control of limits alienates the members of an organization, creates mistrust and insecurity, and promotes the formation of cliques. It is hardly difficult to find examples of cases like this. And there is nothing to be wondered at the fact that the flow of information is seen as the central problem of almost every organization and working place.

C. P. Alderfer (1976), an organization researcher, has described how the vitality of an organization depends on the openness of its limits. The dependency can be described as the letter U turned upside down as seen in the following figure.
Alderfer emphasizes that concrete existing limits create subjective limits in people’s minds. Those who belong to the management group, the board of directors or the administration are seen as a separate caste in the minds of those who have been left outside. This leads gradually to the diminishing of interaction, increasing of distance, and differentiation of the groups’ social realities. The same phenomenon applies to other hierarchical limits. In the dining room of a hospital or an institution you can with a quick glance detect the invisible limits between the dining people: the tables of the management, the nurses and the patients can certainly be discerned.

Each one of us can study these limits inside our minds for instance by imagining that you go and sit down at the management’s table when you are not “a member of the gang”. What kind of feelings and thoughts are aroused? Have we internalized the limits of hierarchy as norms that direct our behavior? Similar invisible barriers are likely to be found in most of the work communities.

According to Alderfer, inflexible limits within an organization also characterize its relationships to the environment. If an organization can not utilize its inner re-
sources, it has usually also closed itself from the outside world. But an excessive openness of limits is not good either. It reveals that the community has a weak identity, that it lacks policy lines and willpower. The openness or ‘closedness’ of an organization is determined by the policy lines chosen by the management and the administration. If the plans and decisions concerning the organization and the work community are made behind closed doors, it will arise insecurity and, in the personnel, the need to defend themselves in every possible way. Distrust, fed by weak flow of information, leads to the formation of closed cliques which compete with each other, and from which the community as a whole will suffer.

The internal openness of an organization is connected to its ability to cope with its problems. Groups and communities that have open and reciprocal relationships between their members cope better with new and surprising situations, with problems that can only be solved with creativity, than communities where there is little openness and reciprocity between the members (Alderfer, 1976).

The figure below depicts a model of an organization with open decision-making and exercise of power carried out by Makarenko and Jones.

![Diagram](image)

*Figure 6. A model for open decision-making structure, where the decision-making forums are open for any member of the organization (Murto, 1991, 178).*
Even though Makarenko and Jones as leaders of their communities had formal decision-making power in many questions, they did not use it over the decisions made in the general meetings. The same applies to the decision-making bodies that equal to a board of directors, where the will and decisions of the general meeting were complied with. In both communities it was remarkable that the leader was available at any time for anyone who wanted to meet him, and prepared to talk about any questions whatsoever; meetings of the management group were open for anyone willing to attend; the general meeting was held every day and it factually had the highest power of decision. Since the internal activities of the communities differed from the official rules and practices of the environment and the society, it naturally caused many problems. They were, however, not able - perhaps because of critical conditions in the societies - to hinder the development of the mentioned communities.

To open up the decision-making forums in public administration might be the way in which the creative resources and activity of the personnel and even of the clients could be awakened and the faith in societal democracy restored.

Jonathan Boswell (1990), a British economist, looks at the ill-effects caused by the lack of cooperation on societal level. According to him, the cooperation traditions of companies, the state and the labor unions create the basis for the taking of responsibility for the condition of the whole nation. Boswell shows how such states where cooperation between the above mentioned sectors has worked well, have got over their economic troubles better than other states.

In Finland the cooperation between the employer and the employee organizations has always been reluctant. The results can be seen in the personnel’s poor chances to participate in the decision-making of companies and public administration. The centralized incomes policy agreement got the most negative response from the Confederation of Finnish Trade Unions and its suborganizations. The most positive reception it met with the labor unions and central organizations of civil servants and especially of the upper...
clerical personnel. Sociologically the situation can be understood as a result of the small amount of common social reality between the basic level workers and the employer sectors, and the weak mutual trust that results from it.

The less the employers and their representatives have interaction with the personnel on the organization level, the less common social reality they will have, and the weaker will the preconditions to understand and trust each other become. Clerical employees and especially upper clerical employees and civil servants have more, and more regular, cooperation with the employers than the workers, which has led to the development of greater common social reality and mutual understanding. Thus it has been easier for these groups to understand and trust each other in economic crises and to reach an agreement on the basis of general interest than what it has been for the employee organizations. The same applies also to the relationships between the employers and employees in the organizations of the state and the municipalities.

The less there are forums for cooperation and interaction between different sectors, the more prejudice and distrust will be created. During economic booms the gaps of confidence and cooperation can be filled with money, but during depression the gaps will grow into abysses and fill with distrust, envy and hatred. To build bridges over these abysses is even later on a slow and painful process. That is why, to prevent these conflicts, it would be necessary to create cooperation forums between and within the sectors, and to support their activities.

With special urgency these forums are needed in the cooperation of the employers, the management and the workers. They should promote direct, regular, and continuous interaction. Cooperation between the organizations or representative cooperation is not enough. Common social reality can only be created in direct cooperation that has to be continual in order to destroy the substrate of suspicion and distrust. Common forums are also needed badly for the utilization of the creative forces in organizations, and for the proactive adjustment to quick changes in the environment.
Keskisuomalainen (28.4.1992), a Finnish newspaper, published an article about Antero Kiviniemi, a managing director, who has an apt view of the future of the Finnish banking world and the political economy.

“Our problem is that no one controls the whole with a firm hold. The limitation of liability between the state, the financiers, the companies and the unions is unclear. These groups hold to their camps that each have contrary objectives. ... An economic spin can, according to Kiviniemi, be avoided with cooperation. One has to acknowledge the economic realities and to plan in cooperation a development program and its realization as projects. ... New large investments are not necessary, instead we need determined development and cooperation ...”

We can add to Kiviniemi’s views that each person working in the various sectors should have an overall view, not just the strong leader. We should also adopt a reserved attitude towards strong leaders and disposable development programs and projects. The cooperation between the state, the financiers, the entrepreneurs and the unions should be continual interaction reaching from the management to the basic level of the organizations in order to establish and preserve common social reality.

From these national perspectives I shall return to the creation of internal common social reality in communities and organizations, where the functional structure of the community has a central role.