Kari Murto

LEADING THE PROCESS
TOWARDS THE PROCESS CENTERED DEVELOPING OF WORK COMMUNITY
FOR ANNUKKA AND MIIKKA
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Leading the process of change

To lead a change is a current and expansive topic. Here I shall view it from the standpoint of personnel’s participation and in the light of an empirical study made already in the 1940’s. The study was made in a little town called Marion in Virginia, USA. Lester Coch and John R. P. French, Jr. (1968) studied (1) why people so strongly resist change, and (2) how you can win the resistance towards change. The subject of the study was the main plant of Harwood Manufacturing Corporation that manufactured pajamas and other garments by the piece. The workers were women aged 23 on the average. When the tasks were changed, a temporary loss of earnings was required a hundred percent. Irrespective of this, the change of tasks increased the number of those who resigned to threefold in comparison to those who continued in their previous tasks.

The resignations occurred either right after assuming the new tasks or just before reaching the norm that would entitle full pay in the new tasks. Consistency of the group was found to affect the performances and the resignations. In a consistent group people ventured to express the annoyance caused by the changes more openly than in an incoherent group, but resignations were also fewer in the consistent groups. Moreover, a consistent group set a norm for the upper limit for individual performances, and that was not to be exceeded. The researchers stated that change resistance was the joint result of individual frustration and group influence.

In the change they tried to utilize the group in handling change resistance. in the experiment they formed three groups that all had to go through a similar change in the working tasks. The groups were following:

1. **Group that did not participate.** The change that had already been planned was presented and explained to the group before the realization of the change. In a common discussion the group members’ questions were answered.

2. **Group that participated through representatives.** The change was discussed with all the members of the
group, and the need for it was convincingly explained by the necessity of decreasing production costs and increasing competitiveness. After that, some members of the group were included in the planning of the change and in training. The whole group was convinced of the necessity of the change and accepted the plan. The group was right from the beginning interested in the change and willing to cooperate.

3. **Groups where all the members participated.** All the members of two groups participated in the planning and realization of the change. The groups were motivated in the same way as the group that participated through its representatives.

In relation to both work performance and resignations, the two groups where all members participated reached the best results, as shown in figure 12.

![Figure 12. Work performances by groups before and after the change. (Coch & French, 1968).](image)

The work performances of those who did not participate did not rise after the decline following the change.
Instead, the resistance to change was manifested in aggression towards the management, in conflicts with working methods, in anger towards the foremen, in intentional slowing down of the production and in lack of willingness to cooperate with the superiors. During the days that followed the change 17% of the workers resigned.

The work performance of the group that participated through representatives rose after the decline following the change to the previous level in 14 days. The members had a positive attitude and were willing to cooperate. That is why cooperation with the superiors was smooth. No one resigned during the 40 days that followed the change.

The groups where everyone participated were the fastest to reach their previous performance level in the new tasks and even exceeded it by 14 percent. Cooperation with the superiors was smooth, there were no signs of aggressiveness, and no one resigned during the 40 days following the change.

Those members of the non-participating that stayed in their jobs were dispersed to different tasks, and after two months they were gathered to a group again for another experiment. The group was transferred to new tasks, but this time the model of full participation was applied. Now the results were completely contrary to the first results of the group (the non-participating group). The group’s performances returned quickly to the level they had been prior to the change and exceeded it as the first fully participating groups had done. There was no aggressiveness whatsoever, and no one resigned during the 19 days following the change.

From the point of view of the factory costs, the fact that the groups where everyone participated reached the previous performance level quickly and exceeded it as well as the continuation of the employment meant indispensable savings and success in improving the competitiveness, which were, indeed, the aims of the changes. In particular the second experiment with the non-participating and dispersed group showed that the different results of the groups were not caused by differences in skills or personalities, but they were the result of differences in
chances to participate. The essential meaning of group pressure became apparent in the abrupt decrease of individual differences in performance after the change. Even though the performance differences decreased in all the groups, it was most abundant in the non-participating group. In practise it meant that group discipline and control were tightening, which was to prevent the increase of performance level of individual group members.

The two groups where all members participated, assumed new tasks on the same day, and they started to compete with each other. The competition probably caused the improvement of performances to a higher level than previously by raising the performance norms of the groups.

This study by Coch and French shows how important in planning and realizing organizational and communal changes it is to negotiate with all those individuals and groups that will be affected by the change. It is paradoxical that facts that have been verified half a century ago, and many times after that, are not yet a part of everyday life. The most common model in the public sector is probably cooperation based solely on informing or representative participation, where people think they can control change only by the expertise and overall view of the management.

5.2. Leading the process in units

The task of a unit leader or superior is to create a well functioning work community. He usually has sufficient authority, even the responsibility, to do that. But how is it done in practise? Since community development has been described in another place (see p. xx-xx), I shall concentrate here in the methods that serve to create a good community. The first requirement is to organize common forums (meetings and discussions). It is not enough if the manager himself has got good relations to each member of the staff, if the relationships between the staff members are in a bad way or cliquish. That is why it is necessary to take time regularly and often enough, once a
week for example, to stop to examine and discuss together what has been done and lived through. This is the most important part of developing the functional structure of a unit, a structure that guarantees open communication and emergence of conflicts that bring forward the community development.

To support open interaction in these meetings and discussions is what the manager has on his responsibility. People’s ability and courage to talk and act in a large group is very modest. They need time, practise, and most of all, the manager’s active encouragement to venture to participate and to bring up difficult topics. Since we are dealing with a very demanding task, it is necessary to set aside time to learn it. Sometimes the commencement is burdened by previous negative experiences, as the personnel in an insurance company reports in a study by Perkka-Jortikka (1992, 124-125).

“The clerical employees had, however, a reserved attitude towards open and confidential discussion with the superiors, because the negative feelings caused by previous discussions were still on people’s minds.”

Then again, the clerical employees did believe that regular work community meetings and discussions would be a useful way to influence interaction, management, and haste control, and to promote social well-being.

The manager needs knowledge, skill and courage, and especially in the beginning, support and encouragement in maintaining the process. We have not, either as managers or as subordinates, learned a creative and equitable meeting practise. We have grown on to bureaucracy and the routines it calls for, but not on to examining group processes. We look upon quick decision-making as efficiency. True discussion, examination of conflicts, motivating different opinions, and expression of feelings have been seen as phenomena that disturb meetings rather than advance them. Is it then a wonder that so many of us feel that meetings are a ritualistic compulsion and not a forum where you go into real problems. Usually it is only the
liberation of ‘compulsion’ after the meeting that loosens the tongues and brings up emotions.

A new kind of meeting practise has to be learned. That is why regularity is needed and that is why continuity is needed. The spirit of today calls for quick results, but personal development and learning a new kind of meeting practise take time. The yield from this kind of a process is, nevertheless, creative capacity, the value of which is very much on the rise. The contribution is worthwhile to the one who has got courage. Courage is most of all required of the managers, who will have to be prepared to step down from their top floors and from behind red lights to the presence of their subordinates.

To lead an interaction process requires group and community dynamic skills and knowledge of the manager, but most of all, good self-reliance and courage to put himself at stake. Manager training and election will pay more attention than before to these characteristics. “Big time managers” are not needed for they are known to have tender toes.

When a manager starts to conduct common meetings regularly and with the aim to develop the community, it should be done in an atmosphere that is as natural and informal as possible. For quite a long time the interaction will be starlike, communication flows between the manager and individual subordinates. Communication between the subordinates is relatively scarce. Well learned conventions and social pressure tempt the manager to manage in the accustomed way by making decisions, giving orders, and assuming responsibility when the subordinates ask and require. To learn new kind of interaction, and for the subordinates to learn to assume responsibility, requires from the manager conscious restraint from one-sided decision-making whenever there is no compulsion to do that. Community interaction in an early stage is described below in figure 13.
If the manager genuinely wants to support the communal interaction process, he should determinedly but discreetly show that the bringing up of the participants’ own views, opinions, experiences and feelings is valuable even when the criticism is directed towards the manager himself. To establish a confidential and secure atmosphere is slow, but to destroy it takes only a split second. The easiest way to destroy the dawning confidence is to punish the critic, who is taking a great risk, or not to carry out a decision that has been made together.

In the early stages the subordinates may be insecure and nervous about the meetings. Then the criticism is easily aggravated and exacerbated. If the manager or superior feels that the criticism is unfair, he may defend himself with a counter attack, and at that very moment he loses his chance to create a secure community. In order to avoid this, it is wise to be prepared to the outbursts of the early stages, and if possible, seek work counseling. Whether the criticism is justified or unjustified, the manager should be able to take it and to make constructive
use of it. If the manager has a chance to go through his own feelings and experiences in work counseling, it will benefit both the manager and the work community.

When the security increases in the community, interaction starts to spread more evenly among the participants. We are moving from the starlike interaction model to a netlike model, as can be seen in figure 14.

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 14.** The security of the community shows itself in netlike interaction. As a result of interaction, the objectives of the individuals and the community become closer. M = Manager; S = subordinate; O = objective.

The psychological position of the manager has changed from the center of interaction to an equal member of the community. In a community like this, communication is usually not very much dependent on the presence or absence of the manager. The community is able to make decisions and bear the responsibility for them. This does by no means diminish the importance of the manager to the community. The concrete value of the manager is, however, determined by his ability to support and maintain open communication and functionality in his community. It is especially demanding in conflicts and critical situations. In the following chapter I shall deal with how to handle them in a community.