LEADING THE PROCESS

TOWARDS THE PROCESS CENTERED DEVELOPING OF WORK COMMUNITY
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An experience that is probably known to most of us from meetings at the working place is that especially in larger groups there are only a few that address the meeting while the majority is silent and passive. After the meeting people gather in pairs and in small groups, and very fluent and lively discussion commences. The progress of the meeting, the addresses, and the decisions are commented on and evaluated. Differing opinions and even dissatisfaction are regrettably often brought up only afterwards. This kind of review that is done afterwards in small groups, a postmortem, cannot, however, change what has been done undone nor can it help the community as a whole to learn from its experience. As for the individuals, letting the feelings out even afterwards has got therapeutic meaning that decreases frustration and pressures. That is why it is essential as well.

In order to make the meetings work most efficiently as forums for ideation, discussion, decision-making and evaluation, as many participants as possible should be able to feel secure and that their opinions are valuable. Moreover, when we are talking about a meeting at the working place, the community or the group should feel that it has value and abilities as a whole. In the foregoing I have already emphasized how important, as regards to interaction skills and the security of the community, it is that the meetings are regular, that they meet often enough, and that the manager has an active, encouraging attitude towards open talking and responsible listening. In addition to these requirements, communal learning requires examination of what has been done and lived through. That is why each discussion and meeting should be closed twice (Murto, 1989): first after the actual matters on the procedure, when the examination of the meeting, the review, starts by discussing, by exchanging experiences and by evaluating (figure 17).
In his writings on the operations of the therapeutic community, R. D. Hinshelwood (1987) has suggested that work meetings and meetings that analyze the state of the community should be separated from each other. Based on my own experiences, it seems that the review at the end of the meetings offers a chance when we can, or have to, face and evaluate the state of the community every time, if we can ask the right questions and answer them honestly.

These kinds of questions could be for example the following:

1. Did we handle the right things? If not, then why not?
2. What did we, then, talk about? Why?
3. How was the atmosphere of the meeting?
4. Did we decide something, did we agree something? What?
5. Was everyone able to say what he had wanted? If not, then why not?
6. Was everyone listened to? If not, then why not?
7. Did we fail to handle an important matter? If we did, then why?

**Did we handle the right things?**

Sometimes in a meeting you get a feeling that you should be talking about something else, something more important. It is sometimes hard to say what that more impor-
tant thing is, and that is why it is hard to make a proposal. The same feeling can trouble you even after the meeting, although outwardly everything seems to be all right. When the meeting is reviewed, it is possible to talk about the feeling and to learn if someone else has had the same experience. Through examining together what had been talked about and where this kind of feeling might have come from, it is possible to get hold of questions concerning for instance cooperation or the personal relations of the participants.

If you follow the procedure of the meeting, it is hard to bring up problems concerning cooperation. While handling the items, the problems can be disguised in divergent opinions and disputes that arise from trivialities.

**How was the atmosphere?**

This has proved to be a good question in getting hold of problems that deal with human relations in the community and with cooperation. If people dare to agree that the atmosphere was tense, nervous or strained, the next thing to do is to think about reasons for it. Usually at this point people start to bring up feelings of disappointment, unfairness, offenses, rivalry, or symptoms of a power or authority battle. To handle these matters usually takes more time than what has been reserved for reviewing the meeting, but everyone seems to find time to go on or be willing to make an appointment for the next meeting as soon as possible, so that these crucial conflicts concerning the community and cooperation could be dealt with.
Figure 18. Closing the meeting by reserving time at the end for reviewing it offers a chance to start analyzing the state of the community, its human relations and cooperation.

The following example tells about the importance of review. The participants of a five-day course planned to have a farewell party on the night before the last day of the course. The issue was brought up in the common meeting, where no one objected to the party. The place, time, dining and other arrangements for the party were agreed upon together. At the end of the meeting we had a review, where the participants unanimously concluded that the atmosphere had been dull, not excited. When we started to think about the meaning of the atmosphere and the reasons in the background, very strong feelings of insecurity and fear came up:

- "How is it going to turn out, how should we behave ourselves there?"
- "Shall I have to do something that I don’t want to?"
- "Can we still call having the party into question?"

The discussion revealed that behind the dullness and indifference of the meeting there was suspicion, fear, feeling of pressure and a taste of forcefulness, which they now could clothe in words. This led us to consider, what a “party” meant for each one of us, and what kinds of images and feelings based on earlier experiences were con-
nected to it. During the couple of hours spent in the meeting and the review, we saw that the course community did not yet have a common language in this issue and not very much common social reality. The decision concerning the party was moved to the following day, when it was made smoothly, and had the same content as the decision made in the original meeting.

Unlike the party described in the foregoing, this party had a relaxed and forceless atmosphere, as we stated in the review of the following morning.

I still want to point out that before the discussion of the party described here, I had told the example of the earlier party when I had been talking about verbalization and dramatization. Knowing the theoretical side of the matter would, however, probably not have saved the party from becoming dramatization, if we had not been able to analyze together the fantasies and feelings behind the meeting atmosphere - and it is expressly the review that deserves the credit for it.

**Did we decide something and did we agree on something?**

It has proved worthwhile at the end of a meeting or a discussion to ask about agreements or decisions that have been made. When I have been consulting work communities, I have noticed that people who have been in the same occasion see and interpret the events in very divergent ways. When I have met the group again, maybe after only a few days, I have asked if we made an agreement on something the previous time. The group is often divided to those that think we had made certain agreements, and to those that remember that we had talked about them but not that we had made an agreement on something.

When I ask the first group what we had agreed, the group is divided again to smaller groups in accordance to what each one thought we had agreed.

The fact that people are left with divergent opinions of decisions and agreements, shows of course in the way they are complied with, and leads to quite conflicting practices. The compliance or non-compliance with agree-
ments, which is based on the differences of opinions and interpretations and depends on the person, is naturally reflected to the relations between people, and it is the cause of many kinds of tensions. That is why discussing in the review the things that possibly were decided or agreed on, can save us from many conflicts.

**Did you get it out and were you listened to?**

Committing to common lines and agreements is directly connected to a person’s chances to influence them. The mere right to be present in a decision-making situation can not be interpreted as an adequate guarantee for a chance to influence. Established roles and positions in the operations of groups and communities can maintain inequality among people: the opinion of certain people is listened to more carefully, and it weighs more than others in decision-making regardless of its content. It can be the opinion of a superior, his right-hand man, or a person that otherwise is powerful and expresses himself with ease. Just as well, a proposal made by a participant, who is formally in a lower position and maybe quiet in nature, can be repeatedly passed over without careful consideration.

This is how work communities waste their creative human potential without even noticing it. Just like all individual and communal activities tend to become routinized in the course of time, so does the interaction pattern of community meetings: the same people keep talking, and certain people are listened to more carefully. This creates predictability and security, maybe speeds up the handling of matters, and gives an erroneous impression of efficiency, but it does not guarantee the best results or the emergence of the most creative ideas. The way in which those who are quiet and have been left aside commit themselves to decisions and agreements, may leave a lot to be desired for. Why don’t the decisions materialize in the everyday life, even though they are made ‘together’?

When we talk about open communication, the meaning of listening goes easily unnoticed. In the background of the quietness of the quiet people in the community there may be experiences of lack of listeners. Most peo-
ple get tired of talking if no one is listening. Listening is not just being politely quiet while someone else is talking. Responsible listening means that the listener tries to put himself in the speaker’s place and to understand what he is saying. In practice it often entails encouraging the speaker and asking specifying questions. Active listening described by Thomas Gordon (1979) illuminates well the skill of listening and its meaning in the communication between people.

Did we fail to handle an important matter?
Sometimes things that seem small and insignificant may take an unreasonable amount of time. The meeting got stuck with them even though everyone felt it was frustrating. Respectively, an important issue on the procedure may therefore remain untreated or receive too superficial handling. In the meeting review it is therefore important to consider why it happened. Did they fear, and why, to handle the important matter? Was the reason in a too tight procedure? Did the meeting start late for some reason, which?

Difficulty of examining the meeting
Experience has showed that examining the meetings at the end has led to a more efficient utilization of the meeting time. For example, people are not anymore late, or not nearly as often as previously, for the meetings since they know that in the review they have to acknowledge publicly that their late arrival caused the delay of the meeting. Especially if important matters are therefore left without handling, the feeling of guilt heightens the morale and guides to punctuality. It has turned out to be more difficult to hold on to the examination. The issues on the procedure take easily more time than had been reserved for them at the cost of the time that should be spent on examination. I wonder if it were useful to set the alarm to go off when the time for the examination should start? At least it would force to make a conscious decision on whether to stop to examine and review the meeting, or to go on with the issues on the procedure. If the examina-
tion, intentionally or unintentionally, is not carried out, it can be a symptom of the critical state of the community, which people are afraid to face.

Examining and reviewing the meeting have to be learned just as any other new thing. In the beginning it easily happens that the participants go on talking about the issues of the meeting without being able to detach themselves from them and to take their own behavior and the actions of the group during the meeting under examination. In a situation like this, the superior or the chairman of the meeting should bring the discussion back to the review of the meeting that has just taken place.

Figure 19. In the examination stage the task of the superior or of the chairman is to bring the discussion back to the review of the actual meeting (point X), if people continue talking about the issues on the procedure.

When the necessary cooperation forums included in the functional structure of the community, and when the leader or the superior of the community is able to lead the interaction process and to support the actions of the forums, the preconditions for the community’s inner development have been created. In the following I shall describe the development of communities chiefly from the point of view of communal self-esteem and identity.