LEADING THE PROCESS

TOWARDS THE PROCESS CENTERED DEVELOPING OF WORK COMMUNITY
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DEVELOPING OF WORK
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7. TANGLES AND OBSTACLES IN LEADING THE PROCESS

Practical experiences from process centered development have also revealed many defects, limitations and problems connected to organization structures and people’s personalities, and they can stop the development. There is plenty of material on the education and treatment communities that were developed under the leadership of Anton Makarenko, Maxwell Jones and Kalevi Kaipio (Makarenko, 1957, 1958; Jones, 1952, 1968, 1976, 1982; Kaipio, 1977; Kaipio & Murto, 1980; Murto, 1989, 1991), so that I don’t think it is necessary to review them here. Especially interesting from the point of view of leading a process are the experiences described by Morton Deutsch (1985) from the cooperative companies owned by the workers or their communities (The U.S. Plywood Cooperatives in the United States, The Mondragon Cooperative System in Spain, the kibbutzim in Israel and the cooperatives of the former Yugoslavia). The experiences are of current interest also from the point of view of developing the institutions and organizations of the Finnish public administration. The dissolution and decentralization of centralized organizations and the formation of units with result responsibility means a shift towards a “market strategy” or “market models” (Julkunen, 1992). Instead of traditional privatization, a cooperative controlled by the staff or by a regional community could work as an alternative worth trying.

Based on parallel results of laboratory and field surveys, Deutsch states that organizations that are based on cooperation and equality are at least as efficient and productive as organizations that operate on the basis of hierarchy and inequality of the personnel. If efficiency and productivity require good cooperation, moving towards democratic and equal cooperation and breaking
away from the traditional hierarchic-authoritarian antithesis will increase productivity and decrease alienation. In practise this can be carried out in many ways:

- by moving from individual salary to a pay system for a group,
- by the workers’ participation in decision-making and profit-sharing,
- by moving from outside ownership to workers’ ownership,
- by applying democratic control instead of authoritarian control.

The changes do not imply a denial of individual performance or responsibility, but they emphasize how the dependence on the performance of others strengthens rather than weakens responsibility as well as motivation to work and to cooperate.

Despite their good results, the democratically controlled and led cooperatives have met with quite many difficult practical problems that threaten the survival of the principles of equality, democracy and cooperation when the community grows older. Democracy is threatened by the members’ uneven participation, which on the one hand is due to structural obstacles in the community, and on the other hand to obstacles connected to the members’ personality, interests and skills. The size of the community and the time reserved for the meetings are the most important structural factors. When the size of the community grows, the time needed for common meetings is longer. In larger communities also the proportion of those who participate actively is smaller than in small communities. Personal differences are connected to the intensity of commitment, educational backgrounds, knowledge, skills and thirst for power. The materialization of democracy calls for preventing power to be concentrated in the hands of a few.

Deutsch proposes the following measures to prevent oligarchy:

1. Keeping the size of the groups small enough so
that the community members’ direct participation and direct democracy are possible.

2. Cycling the task of the participants, leaders and the community so that power is divided to as many as possible.

3. Removing privileges and bonuses connected to leadership and authority positions.

4. Supporting the personnel’s commitment to democratic values with the aid of education and training.

5. Practicing the skills required by participation and giving the personnel information that is needed in participation.

6. Developing the kind of procedures and using the kind of technology that guarantees the personnel expansive chances to participate.

7. Following the materialization of the democratic process with regular and independent surveys, and making necessary amendments. (Deutsch, 1985, 245).

The community’s cooperation can be endangered by such social psychological processes like specialization, attachment and accommodation to the group. Specialization can lead to a formation of a group of specialists that concentrate on their own interests. People’s attachment for each other can create a system of special favorites and cause cliques. Accommodation to the expectations of others or to the pressures of the group prevents the utilization of individual creativity and causes inner dissatisfaction. According to Deutsch, it is possible to prevent cooperation from becoming endangered with similar means as the deterioration of democracy:

1. The ill effects of specialization can be prevented by cycling and enriching working tasks.

2. Supporting communication within and between groups, which helps to discover common needs and interest.

3. Community centeredness can be strengthened by education and training.

4. The unity of the group can be strengthened by creating common symbols, rituals and occasions.
5. Cooperation can be promoted by creating coordinating cooperation bodies above the groups.
6. Conformity and accommodation to group pressures are prevented by respecting and emphasizing individuality and respect of diversity.
7. By emphasizing individual responsibility and by revealing “shirking” it is possible to take necessary measures.
8. By making regular and objective surveys of the functionality of the cooperation system, and by correcting discovered defects. (Deutsch, 1985, 246).

According to Deutsch, a community based on equality does not suit everybody. Some people find such communities too restricting. That is why the membership of these communities should be voluntary. In its purest form it would be most suitable for smaller communities the members of which have a chance to personal interaction.

The experiences from the cooperatives show that smaller cooperatives need a financial and expertizing support network in order to stay alive. The cooperatives also have to be able to take care of their inner coherence on the basis of common values. The leader’s role in developing the ideology is decisive. However, the common ideology has to be subject to constant re-evaluation and correction based on experience. The collaboration of the cooperatives makes it possible to learn from others’ experiences, but practise suggests that each cooperative has to “discover the wheel again”, i.e. go its own way of trial and error. The fact that there is very little research material on the subject so far does not make things easier. (Deutsch, 1985, 248-249).

**Alarming signs**
The basic idea of the process centered development strategy is that each member should learn to take personal responsibility for himself and for his community. This requires activeness and courage. The superiors and managers of the work community are in a key position. Their self-reliance, knowledge and social skills decide to which
direction the community will change: whether it will develop or regress. In the following, some symptoms indicating regression.

1. Those who are in an authority position are afraid to be subject to examination

The starting point of development is that those who are in superior positions should be able to surrender themselves, with their comings and goings, to be subject of communal discussion, and to accept feedback from their subordinates and colleagues. This creates a secure communal atmosphere and provides the other community members with patterns of behavior. If the ones in authority positions venture to subject themselves to criticism and if they do not allow their actions to be analyzed and confronted, the community, not even as a unity, has not got chances to develop to a high standard work community.

Methods to avoid feedback of one’s self or actions are for example:

- dominating the meetings by talking as much as possible,
- making the agenda and the procedure suitable for oneself,
- staying away from meetings under various kinds of pretexts, arranging other ‘more important’ occasions, forgetting the meeting, or being late for the meeting,
- a contradiction between verbal and non-verbal communication, for example encouraging open talking but communicating by gestures and facial expressions that someone is talking about something wrong,
- slipping from common decisions or hindering them by letting the personnel talk about the issue, but acting so that a clear decision is not reached, and the manager or the superior has a chance to act in accordance to his own will. If he is criticized, he can always cite that there was no common decision.
- shifting the common meetings “since there are no important issues”, or suppressing the meetings altogether as unnecessary. Regardless of the work com-
munity, there are always common issues. This is a question of not venturing to take the issues to handling, when also the handling of other issues seems frustrating.

Giving up common meetings leads unavoidably to a breakup of common social reality, to cliques and to a decline of the community level.

2. Refraining from emotional expressions
Keeping to business and overemphasizing rationality lead to the fact that the feelings connected to them crop up indirectly, when the feelings are hard to get at. The crucial thing in the defense strategies described by Argyris, is that emotions connected to interaction are concealed, which prevents reaching the desired end result and the chance to learn. Most common is to hide negative feelings because of the insecurity of the community.

3. Difficulty to examine the actions of oneself and the group
This shows in reluctance to common meetings. People cannot find time for them, or issues that would be important enough. If arranging common meetings does come out, closing them with a review will not come out. Thus there is no chance to get at the things that hamper the meetings no more than at developing them.

4. Crumbling personnel community
The personnel’s great turnover, increase of study leaves, sick leaves and absences are symptoms and consequences of a rapid deterioration of the state of the community. The abundance of new employees and substitutes crumbles communality, common social reality, and threatens the survival of the communal culture. If common forums are lacking or if they do not work, the downhill is really steep.

If not the superior, then who?
In the foregoing my starting point has been that developing a work community is primarily the responsibility
of the leader or the superiors. But if the leader or the superior is not willing or able to take responsibility for development, does the personnel have a chance to develop its work community? In that case it has, if the leader or the superior does not openly oppose. In each community there are active and responsible persons that can act as the core group of development. The leaders’ passive support and willingness to stand by common agreements already make development possible. This does not mean apparent democracy, where the leader pretends to go along, but in actual fact does what he pleases. Even a leader that is passive and gives chances, is required to be open, reliable and brave to defend his community.

Risk taker
There is always someone in the community that is more sensitive than others to see conflicts and problems and has the courage to bring them to common handling. If it is about authority or exercise of power, the one who brings it up takes a risk. He may risk his chances of advancement, his raise in wages, his position or even his job. This can happen even if the personnel had been encouraged to express their feelings and opinions openly.

When difficult issues are brought to discussion, the rest of the personnel usually follow the events quietly and passively. Their later behavior is affected by the fate of the risk taker. Even if the problem or disadvantage were generally known and acknowledged, in a critical situation the risk taker is regrettably often left alone regardless of the fact that his friends support him off the record.

Whatever the risk taker’s fate, he has done the community a favor by testing the consistency of the community’s credibility, talks and deeds. Instead of seeing the risk taker as fouling his own nest or sowing dissension, the management should respect his courage and also show it openly. Otherwise it is probably idle to await more open communication or development of security within the organization. It would also be wise for the risk taker to secure his rear by making an agreement with one or two people that think the same way, that they would give their
open support when he brings up the issue.

**An outside expert**

Communities that function badly and struggle with their problems resort, either of their own will or under the management’s pressure, to an outside expert to fix the situation. My own experiences from working as a consultant and community work supervisor in weak (no identity) communities support the view that work supervision that takes place at long intervals, maybe once a month, has little chance to help a community if it does not have other working cooperation forums. The first requirement would be to create forums that meet more often so that the supervised units would develop into a community that could be work-supervised.

Education and consulting are the chances that an outside expert has at his disposal to support the community and its management in organizing the forums in question and to make them work.

A significant problem in the decentralization of organizations and in making the result units into working communities especially in public administration, is connected to concentrating power to the leader of the unit, who is responsible to upper hierarchy, not to his subordinates. The subordinates’ chances to influence and the community’s development chances are totally dependent on the leader: a good leader aims at strengthening them, a bad one at preventing them. In practice the bodies of elected officials that are based on representative democracy, seem to be quite unable to intervene with the actions of even a bad leader. To guarantee real development chances for work communities, in addition to guaranteeing their real independence, also the inner exercise of power in the basic units should be democratized.