DIALOGIC LEARNING COMMUNITIES PROMOTING PRODUCTIVITY AND QUALITY OF WORKING LIFE

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Abstract

Learning at work, innovativeness, managing and co-operating have all been seen as solutions to the challenges posed by various needs for change in organisations. Dialogic learning communities (DLCs) are critical 'tools' for capturing and utilising all of the versatile potential of development as well as increasing the productivity and quality of working life. DLCs are spaces for participating, knowing, interacting socially and supporting as well as reflecting on work practices. Learning communities should be integrated into organisations' strategic objectives and work practices; organisations and managers should legitimate, nurture and care for the DLCs. The benefits and the effectiveness of the DLCs can be measured in money.

Keywords: Dialogic learning communities, productivity, quality of working life

1. INTRODUCTION

Management research and performance studies have attempted to find better ways to increase both the learning potential and the innovativeness of work organisations. Indeed, the present methods and ways of working must be renewed radically in all occupational spheres. Learning at work, innovating, managing and co-operating have all been seen as solutions to the challenges posed by various needs for change. Change, flexibility, creativity and personnel innovations are emphasised. In addition, major structural changes are seen as an inevitable component of an organisation's activities.

This article is one part of the *Dialogic leadership promoting innovativeness* research program (Dinno program, www.dinno.fi) (Syvänen et al., 2012). In this article, we are deepening the Dinno program's theoretical framework by focusing on the theories, which combine 1) leadership and management, 2) organisational learning and 3) productivity and quality of working life. (e.g. Isaacs, 1999; Leibenstein, 1987; Lawler, 2008; Lumijärvi, 2009; Nicolini, Gherardi & Yanow, 2003; Syvänen, 2008, 2010; Syvänen & Loppela, 2013a, 2013b; Tikkamäki, 2006; Tomer, 1987; Wenger, 1999, 2000).

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Here, learning is examined as a core process of contemporary organisations and, specifically, as an integrated part of work processes and management. Dialogic learning communities (DLC) are examined as spaces for participating, generating and sharing knowing, interacting socially, supporting and reflecting on work practices, organisation, management, interaction and work behaviour.

We postulate that a well-functioning dialog between the different actors is one of the most effective means of attaining the required ability to change, to learn as well as to increase productivity and the quality of working life. Dialogic leadership is seen as playing a crucial role in this process.

In our theoretical framework, dialogic leadership, collaboration, participation and DLCs are seen as the important factors promoting organisational efficiency and effectiveness (Lawler, 1986, 2008; Syvänen, 2010). Performance and efficiency research based on the organisational and economic theories often identifies variables, which affect both productivity and quality of working life. (e.g. Bamberger & Meshoulam, 2000; Jiang et al., 2012; Lawler et al., 1980; Lawler, 1986, 2008; Lumijärvi, 2009). In these studies, management, collaboration and participation are the most important variables affecting productivity and quality of working life on both the individual and the collective levels. Learning requires a certain type of resource and 'space', and therefore calls for flexible and co-operative organisational structure and dialogic leadership.

2. OBJECTIVES

In this article, using the relevant scientific literature and the Dinno program's empirical research materials, we are seeking and locating the organisational variables and factors at individual, group and collective levels, which are, according to the theoretical framework, having positive effects on the DLC's co-operative organisation structures and promoting productivity and quality of working life. All of these variables and factors are intertwined in practise and correlated with each other. In the representation of the results, we are focusing on the most critical results including the most important development needs. By concentrating on these results, we make visible the organisational factors that are clearly weakening or making impossible the DLCs and transformational learning and also reducing the potentials of dialog, creativity, innovativeness, motivation, quality of working life and productivity.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Dialogic learning communities

DLCs emphasise socially mediated practice and learning processes. The theoretical background is based on the practice-based approach (Nicolini, Gherardi & Yanow, 2003; Wenger 1999, 2000) and social theory of learning (Lave & Wenger 1991; Wenger, 1999; Illeris, 2002). DLCs call for the highest form of organisational learning, deutero-learning (Argyris & Schön, 1996). It involves reflecting and asking fundamental questions of the assumptions that underlie the existing ways of working and

experimenting. In addition to governing values, it focuses on questioning embedded traditions and systems. This dimension of learning is composed of structural and behavioural components that determine how learning takes place. This type of learning is also known as generative or transformational learning.

Generative and transformational learning calls for dialog. *Dialog* is an old term with long roots in the history of a variety of disciplines such as philosophy and communications (Bakhtin, 1984; Buber, 2002; Habermas, 1979), therapy (Anderson, 1982), group creativity (Bohm, 1996), education (Palmer, 1998) and organising (Isaacs, 1999; Senge, 1990). Based on one of the sited classics of dialog Bakhtin:

> *"Truth is not born nor is it to found inside the head of an individual person, it is born between people collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction"* (1984, 110).

Isaacs (1993) connects dialog to organisational learning when describing it as a sustained collective inquiry into the process, assumptions and certainties that compose everyday practice. Dialogic organisational learning can be examined also as a dialogical scripting (Oswick et al., 2000). The main idea of it is to construct alternative readings and 'plurivocal understanding' of the events. In practice this means creating a resistance to one another. The goal in dialog is not to get the consensus or compromise, but to understand the other as other, to increase the quality of human contact and to promote organisational and individual transformation; it is referred to as a particular quality of meaning-making (Stewart et al., 2004). Open dialog aims at exposing the meaning constructions based on the thinking and actions of the other, thus creating shared understanding. Dialog is a process of discovering and interrogating to achieve understanding or agreement; it is thinking and learning together (Isaacs, 1999).

Four dimensions of DLCs are integrated and overlapping in practice: participating, knowing, social supporting and reflecting. (Tikkamäki, 2013). DLCs are certain types of 'spaces for dialog, and sense making and examining the sense making' inside and between organisations. They may be formal or informal; they may be organised for different purposes and in a number of different ways. They might be based on face-to-face interaction or virtual utilising of the possibilities of ICT's. Communities can be created around a specific learning task or shared interest areas, and they may consist of experts from the same field or be multiprofessional. They can be facilitated (e.g. by a coach or external experts) or based on peer mentoring. The DCL may be a place for problem solving, reflecting on practice and innovating. It should be a place for sharing half-baked ideas and thinking aloud in public. The daily meetings, developmental discussion and different kind of occasions for learning and development can be organised in a way that supports the principles of DLC. Therefore, it is not introducing entirely new tricks of practices, separated from everyday work, but instead developing present practices to serve participating, knowing, socially supporting and reflecting (Tikkamäki, 2013). One crucial criterion is that the members of the DLCs should experience the DLC as useful and valuable to their own motives and interests, work practice and professional growth. The participants should agree and make explicit the aims and the basic task of the DLC, defining why the DLC exists. At their best, DLCs are significant forums for reorganising organisation and work processes, increasing collective sense making, applying participants' creativity and innovation potentials and improving wellbeing and productivity.

3.1.1 Participating

In order to learn, it is necessary to *participate*, to be engaged in the organisation's practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Participation is action, the gained experiences, relations and interaction with others. Participation has a social nature, and it combines doing, talking, thinking, feeling and the sense of belonging to something (Wenger, 1999, 2000). It also fulfils the basic needs to join and belong to a working community. The possibilities for participation are critical both for learning and for structuring competence. Through participation, individuals construct their experiences and knowledge, engage in practice and social relations as well as construct their identities. When examining participation as a dialogic act the emphasis is on activeness, voicing, giving and receiving a turn and engaging to the community. Influencing and participating are very important for people. The presence or absence of these possibilities will elicit a response on the level of basic psychological needs (Tomer, 1986).

3.1.2 Knowing

The other core process of DLCs is *knowing*, which accumulates as a collective, shared and negotiated process (Nicolini et al., 2003). It can be described as an ongoing socially interactive process that inherently holds the possibility of novelty (Orlikowski, 2002). It consists of knowledge and competences constructed in practice, during the processes of participation. Knowing means co-creation of knowledge and competences where learning and doing are intertwined. Knowing comprises of embrained, embodied, encoded, encultured and embedded knowledge. It is situated, mediated, temporary and contested by its nature (Blackler, 1995.) Knowing and competences are both developed through participation and continuously reproduced and negotiated (Blackler, 1995; Wenger, 1999; Nicolini et al., 2003). Ideally, constructing, sharing and utilising knowing takes place through dialog. From the point of view of dialog, knowing should contain hope of collective sense making, avoiding guessing, developing the thinking and letting things open when necessary. Knowing increases the participants' control of work, which affects positively productivity and quality of working life (Syvänen, 2010).

3.1.3 Social interacting and supporting

Social interacting and supporting play as an important role in meaningful organisational practice and learning (e.g. Illeris, 2002; Syvänen, 2008, 2010; Tikkamäki, 2006, 2013; Wenger, 1999, 2003). Identification and negotiability of meanings takes place through collective and social learning processes (Wenger, 1999). Factors promoting and enabling supportive social interaction include commitment to participation and capabilities and willingness to carry out the main principles of dialog: listening, voicing, appreciating and suspending (Isaacs, 1999). Social supporting takes place through social interaction and collective learning processes at work. It includes peer support, sense of communality and encouragement to participate (Tikkamäki, 2006). Factors promoting social support are the actors' commitment to participation and their ability to carry out dialog. In practice, social supporting takes place in informal and often invisible forms of action and situations in daily work, such as peer-mentoring, problem-solving situations and formal and informal conversations with managers and co-workers. (Tikkamäki,

2013). When examining social interaction and support from the point of view of dialog (Isaacs, 1999), the emphasis is on appreciating oneself and others, showing appreciation for one's own thinking and the thinking of others, encouraging, trusting and taking care of each other. Support affects many basic needs in the organisational context such as joining, belonging, safety, respect and increases intrinsic motivation.

3.1.4 Reflecting

Participation, knowing and social supporting are all tightly connected to the core process of learning: *reflecting*. Reflecting pertains to becoming conscious about analysing, questioning and reframing knowing constructed during participation (Mezirow, 1981; Schön, 1983; Boud et al., 1985). Reflective work practice passes through individual, social and organisational contexts, consisting of individuals' capability (self-directedness, self-awareness) and willingness to reflect and carry out reflective dialog. Reflectivity should also be embedded in management control and evaluation systems. (Hilden & Tikkamäki, 2013.) Reflection is a process involving internal and external dialogs. When carrying out internal dialog, one examines one's own articulations and listens to one's own voice aiming to understand one's values, assumptions and blind spots (Tsang, 2007). Reflectivity as dialog calls for consciousness of and regulating one's own prejudices an routines, opening up new gambits and questions, showing the thinking gaps, feeding positive wondering and questioning as well as stopping and concentrating on that situation at hand. When promoting reflection by external dialog, individuals together try to find and create something new and surprising – to be touched – in open interaction. Reflection promotes also individual control of work. People become more conscious of their internal and external pressures and understand how pressures affect work, work behaviour and interaction (Syvänen, 2010).

Reflection calls for redesigning organisation, management and work by taking into account the time and 'spaces' for reflection. Reflection that takes place in a work context can be called productive reflection (Boud, Cressey & Docherty, 2006). This is indicative of the changes in work practice that strengthen personal engagement and meaning in work and enhance productivity and wellbeing.

3.2 Features of collaborative and high-performance organisations – the ground for DLCs

According to the causal model of the organisational assessment approach (Lawler et al., 1980) the quality of working life and organisational effectiveness are affected by the same individual and collective variables. They are the parameters for planning human resource work as follows:

1) Individual performance capacity (e.g. competencies and skills, training, learning, individual characteristics/features of work, realistic goals and objectives, balance between objectives and resources and control of work)
2) Organisational motivation (e.g. collaborative structures, goals and objectives; equality; justice; self-determination and intrinsic and external motivation)

3) Control and coordination (e.g. rewards, open communication system and information flow, self-directed groups/teams and sharing of competences).

These organisational factors require open and confidential co-operation and dialog between managers and employees. The following list includes the most important elements of influencing and participating in high-performance and dialogic organisations (Isaacs, 1999; Lawler et al., 1980; Leibenstein, 1997; Lumijärvi, 2009; Syvänen, 2010; Tomer, 1987) which are also supporting DLCs.

1) Sense of being part of the organisation and belonging to it
   a) guiding goals, objectives, values and principles
   b) attachment, commitment, organisational motivation and identification with an organization
   c) feedback and rewarding systems
   d) division of profit with employees, reward and bonus systems and performance bonuses
   e) right to point out drawbacks, fair and equitable management of conflicts and dealing with drawbacks
2) Possibility to influence the major decisions and matters in the organisation
   a) dialogic and collaborative organisational and development structures, DLCs
   b) genuine possibilities of participation and influence
   c) information on the organisation's operation and basic tasks
   d) vertical and horizontal flow of information, open and transparent communication system
   e) clarity of the power and responsibility structures and relationships and division of labour
   f) dialogic and collaborative planning system and decision-making
3) Ability to use genuine discretion, to be accountable and have responsibility
   a) power, division of responsibilities and division of work and labour
   b) intrinsic motivation and the features of work (e.g. autonomy, identity and meaningfulness)
4) Experience of co-operative interaction and dialog at work
   a) trust**,** approval, appreciation and equality
   b) equitable or fair position of employees, fairness, justice and equality
   c) support, feedback and encouragement.

3.3 Dialogic and collaborative leadership – facilitating DLCs, productivity and quality of working life

3.3.1 Organisational level

Managers and superiors are crucial actors, for they hold a particular position and power in the organisation in maintaining or restricting vertical relationships and the flow of information and dialog. Isaacs (1999, 83-184) maintains that dialogic leadership is conducted by listening, respecting, voicing and suspending. These principles of dialog promote generative dialog, which is a fruitful foundation for individual and collective learning (Isaacs, 1999, 261). Because of the power structures and organisational roles, employers and managers are the main designers or architects and responsible actors of DLCs. They should create the spaces for and facilitate the processes of dialogic and

reflective learning. Dialogic leadership can be increased by collaboration, wide employee participation, supporting intrinsic motivation, organisational learning and the sharing of knowledge (Syvänen et al., 2012; Syvänen & Tikkamäki, 2013).

There are many responsibilities for employers and managers to support and make possible collaborative development structures, organisational learning and DLCs. These are also very important factors promoting productivity and quality of working life via employer politics, management and leadership. They are connected to DLCs' major contents such as skills, competences, learning, development and renewal. These responsibilities and competences are:

1) Management's ability to adapt to and anticipate the challenges and changes of the environment, context and organisation (e.g. proactive approach, development needs, control of changes, dealing with ambiguity, problems and conflict management, complexity, diversity and flexible leadership style (dialog, interaction and human orientation))
2) The strategic and organisational skills and competences (e.g. goals, objectives, strategic choices, visions and values)
3) Employer, management and leadership skills and competences and development of personnel (e.g. development programs for managers and employees)
4) Transformational leadership (e.g. empowerment, use of creativity, collaboration and setting an example)
5) Management and leadership expertise and skills in specific areas (e.g. efficiency, quality, teams, technology, information, projects, networks and development methods)
6) Leadership skills (e.g. interaction, recruiting and utilising strategic human resource management) (Lumijärvi, 2009).

Collaboration comprises horizontal and vertical interactive relationships, which make up the informal structure of the organisation and make possible DLCs and organisational learning. The organisational economic X Efficiency theory (Leibenstein 1987; Tomer 1987) underlines also the vertical and horizontal relationships and pressures between actors. These organisational variables include:

1) External pressures on organisations and the members of the organisations (managers and employees)
2) Internal organisational pressures (e.g. vertical and horizontal relations, collaboration, development and change and learning)
3) The degree of rationality of decision making
4) The level of work effort.

These factors affect at the individual level work effort, control of work, motivation, willingness to learn and develop and the mutual expectations and interaction between employers/managers and employees.

3.3.2 Individual level – psychological contract between managers and employees

Individuals accept external pressures and respond to them based on their personal psychological structures. The level of effort, which affects further both individual productivity and satisfaction, is connected to the individual characteristics of the work and work processes. (Syvänen, 2010, 41-49) These characteristics are:

1) work activities and contents
2) pace
3) quality and the rhythm
4) timetables of the work.

The background of these factors lies in the personal needs, values, interests and motives. Each individual has the personal optimal level of perceived pressures at which one works best. One of the most important external pressures is the pressure of vertical relationship. (Leibenstein 1987; Syvänen, 2010) Under the vertical pressures, employees have two main expectations/basic needs in this psychological interaction relationship. If they are met true productivity and wellbeing increases. Employees' expectations/needs are:

1) Need of approval, appreciation and respect
    a) features on leadership: respect, equality, parity and fairness
    b) this expectation comes true as incentives, rewards and fees (other than salary), encouragement, motivation, support, help and assistance and feedback
2) Independence and autonomy
    a) employees have a strong need to be independent and autonomous, which means individuality and acceptance of diversity, self-directing or self-managing that provides to the individuals genuine possibilities to make their own choices and to be independent in their own responsibility areas in work and at the workplace
    b) these needs are realised by the divisions of power, responsibilities and labour, individual tasks and works.

Underlying the relationship between managers and employees are the basic human desire to please and the desire to do one's work/job well and with high quality. These desires are very important, especially to human resource management and leadership, because they make strong commitment possible. All managers should understand 1) the importance of the psychological contract (Rousseau, 1995) in the relationship and interaction between employees and supervisors and 2) the impact mechanism of the mutual psychological contract to the productivity, effectiveness, quality of services and wellbeing. (Syvänen, 2010)

While external and internal pressures are at the appropriate level, individuals are capable of maximising their work effort, behaviour and learning potential. In this state of the control of work, individuals are working efficiently, with their motivation and productivity at a high level, and they feel satisfaction and wellbeing at work. In the control of work state the work, competencies and skills and tasks are in a balance, which supports individuals' willingness to learn, change and renew. If the combination of internal and external pressure is either too low or too high, people do not work as well as possible, and not all the potential and resources are in use. If pressure gets too high, individuals might not use their skills fully because they experience the work or working environment as too difficult or stressful (state of overload). When pressure is too low and the environment is too easy (state of under load) both productivity and wellbeing will be reduced because people will not get sufficient stimulus to use or develop their skills, competencies and knowing from their work or working environment; it may also increase turnover. (Syvänen, 2010, 47-57).

The elements of the theoretical framework combining DLCs, dialogic leadership and productivity are summarised in Figure 1.
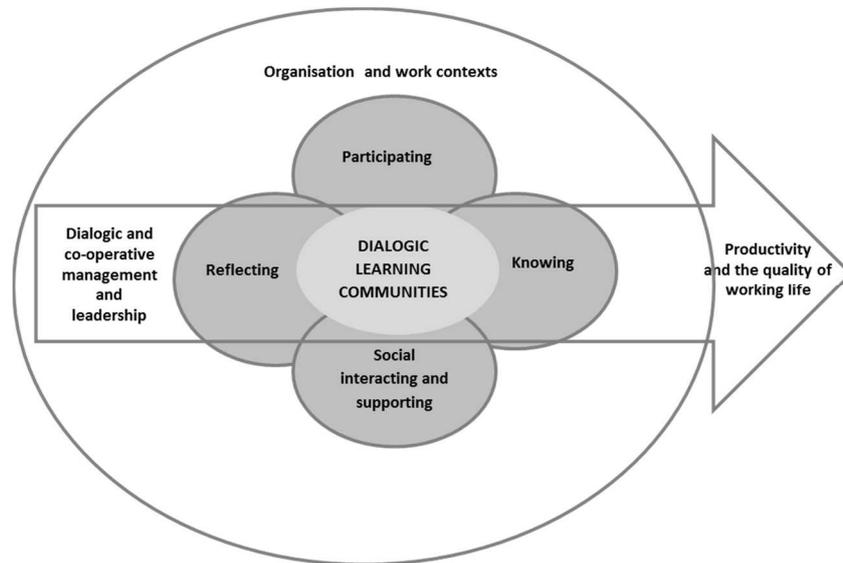

Figure 1. The theoretical framework combining DLCs, dialogic leadership, productivity and quality of working life (modified from Tikkamäki, 2006; 2013)

4. METHODS AND DATA ANALYSES

The Dinno research group conducted a digital survey in November 2012 through February 2013, based on its multidisciplinary theoretical framework. The survey has been used to explore and map the state of individual, group and collective factors that promote leadership, innovativeness, productivity and quality of working life in the organisations studied (Syvänen et al., 2012). From different employment sectors, 2757 people responded to the survey. They represent employees and managers from Dinno's research organisations, the co-operation network from Finnish municipal and church sector organisations, municipal and church sector trade union members and employer organisations. The survey's 200 variables, with a five-level Likert scaling, examine the dimensions and linkages of dialogic leadership, intrinsic motivation, creativity, learning, transformation, renewal, innovativeness, quality of working life and productivity. The survey was carried out as a digital web survey (Webropol Survey Tools).

The results are based on two statistical analyses: the straight distributions and a correlation analysis of the entire data (N = 2757). The straight distributions tell about the experiences (in percentages of respondents) which combine the options 1 and 2 (1 = fully agree/very important; 2 = somewhat agree/somewhat important). The results of a correlation analysis located those variables that correlate *satisfaction* with the variables economy, productivity and efficiency; quality of working life and the possibilities to learn and develop.

5. RESULTS

We present the findings of the survey related to the most important individual-, group- and organisational-level factors affecting and making possible dialogic communities of learning, and influencing positively productivity and quality of working life. The results are categorized based on the four dimensions of DLC: participating, knowing, interacting socially, supporting and reflecting. Here the emphasis is on the most critical results: the experiences of 60% or fewer of the respondents (Tables 1-5).

These results should be taken into account when selecting the most important objectives of organisational development. According to the theoretical framework, because of these weak results, DLCs, dialogic and collaborative leadership and organisation, motivation, creativity, innovations, quality of working life and productivity are at their lowest levels. There is waste or slack of human and economic potential and resources.

5.1 Participating

From the point of view of learning and productivity, it is crucial to ask how the participation is organised. Who are the participants and where, how and why are they participating, and does this organisational challenge enable or inhibit participation? The results suggest many critical factors that influence employees' possibilities to participate, such as what kind of participation is legitimized and how the participation is co-ordinated and rewarded, as well as what kind of rules and agreements guide the participation.

Table 1. The most critical variables supporting participation.

Influence, goals and responsibilities	Percentages of respondents (%)
Good opportunities to influence – physical working conditions (15%) – workload (27%) – work pressure (30%) – acquisition of new work tools (30%) – decision-making (36%) – the changes to work in the planning stage (38%) – working hours (42%) – the contents of work (52%)	15-52%
Usage of different ways of learning at work (working in pairs, work circuits or mentoring)	40%
Occasions for development in the work community are organised regularly	50%
The division of responsibilities in work community support the achievement of the objectives	55%
Responsibility are well balanced in their work community	55%
The goals and objectives are in balance with the individual	57%

resources	
Participation in the goal setting and strategy planning	59%
Values	
People are treated fairly and equitably	59%
The formal values guide the day-to-day practice in the work community	60%
Rewarding	
Satisfaction with the rewards and encouragement system at their workplace	20%
Rewards and work goals are balanced	22%
Rewards are focused at the group level	29%
The reward system is equal	30%
The reward system is clear and logical	31%

The more people have opportunities to influence, the more they will actively participate and develop the work and work community. Active participation is a crucial way to generate learning experiences. The most critical variables related to this were the low possibilities to influence decision-making and participation in goals setting and strategic planning. Reframing participation based on these values will have an influence on engagement. The work values and goals can also be focus for participation and learning. The weak opportunities to influence are the critical factor of control of work, and they have negative or positive impact on satisfaction, wellbeing and productivity. The imbalance between the goals/objectives and the individual resources increases work pressure and reduces control of work and wellbeing. Rewarding showed to be the most critical variable in participation. Rewarding unmasks the kind of participation that is appreciated and promoted in the work community.

5.2 Knowing

The results related to knowing reveal the critical factors related to constructing and sharing knowing. At their best, DLCs are forums for individual and collective sense-making and thinking, for dialog and for professional growth.

Table 2. The most critical variables supporting knowing.

Knowledge, communication	Percentages of respondents (%)
Knowledge sharing is encouraged and rewarded	28%
Having more knowledge than could be used in work	38%
Job-orientation system works well	45%
Employees' ideas and initiatives are utilised in developing work and work community	53%
Matters related to work and work community are discussed openly at official/formal meetings	55%
Satisfaction with openness of information flow and communication in work community	57%
Satisfaction with open sharing of knowledge and know-how	59%

Feedback from customers is discussed and used in developing operations	60%

The results suggest that it is critical to focus on employees' initiatives and to facilitate open sharing of knowing. An open information flow and a dialogic communication culture can promote the construction of and sharing of knowing. The job orientation is crucial from the point of view of constructing and sharing knowing, especially when becoming a member of the work community and when changing work tasks. Job orientation is a very important factor that influences control of work. A poor job-orientation system causes individuals to experience over load or under load, and, due to that, it reduces wellbeing and productivity. The under load of work might support negative work behaviour and increase conflicts. There is also a danger of increasing turnover if work is not motivating enough. In addition, turnover increases costs (e.g. recruiting costs).

5.3 Social interacting and supporting

Social interaction and support are like the glue of DLCs, creating the experience of communality and enhancing engagement. Collaborative organisation structures and work communities have positive influence on productivity and quality of working life. These variables below (Table 3) reveal the most critical factors from the point of view of DLCs and productivity.

Table 3. The most critical variables sustaining social interacting and supporting.

Social interaction and support	Percentages of respondents (%)
An inspiring and participative atmosphere at workplace meetings	42%
Work community's climate promotes learning and joint development	50%
Atmosphere at the workplace supports learning and development	50%
Positive attitudes to new ideas and initiatives in the work community	51%
The workspace/place provides a good framework for co-operation and interaction between workers	56%

The results related to atmosphere, positive attitudes towards initiatives and open-discussion culture are critical from the point of view of DLCs. These factors promote or inhibit the participation and construction of knowing. That is why employers should pay more attention to the atmosphere of working environments and workplace meetings, as well as social relationships and organisational culture.

5.4 Reflecting

Reflecting enables the processes of sense making and constructing, sharing and questioning knowing. Reflection provides new interpretations and new ideas and thus

promotes creativity. Referring to the idea of productive reflection presented earlier, the work should be redesigned by taking into account the time and 'spaces' for reflection. The atmosphere is important from the point of view of questioning and using mistakes as learning experience.

Table 4. The most critical variables supporting reflecting.

	Percentages of respondents (%)
Using creativity in solving the work community's problems and conflicts	28%
Time to think and innovate at work	29%
Time and resources are used to generate new ideas	29%
Work community acts in a creative way	41%
Mistakes and failures are dealt with openly, and they are learned from in the work community	58%
There is courage to question and critically re-evaluate behaviour and points of view in the work community	60%

Based on the results, there is not enough time for reflection and creativity. Work practises and processes (e.g. tasks, duties, co-operation, meetings, learning and development interventions, management control etc.) should be re-organised through the lenses of dialogic and reflective learning. At its best, reflectivity challenges the existing norms and social, cultural and political status quo and perhaps breaks some old patterns. In practice, this means re-evaluating the forms and structures of participation, knowing and social interacting as well as supporting and rewarding. If there are many conflicts and interaction problems, they have a negative influence on the quality of working life; costs increase, and productivity is reduced. Conflict solving and intervening in organisational, group and individual problems and conflicts is very important to people's experiences of safety, which is one of the basic needs of people in the organisational context, and one of the most important responsibilities of the employers and managers. The experience of safety effects the willingness to reflect and critically evaluate the work practice. Investing in managers' skills and support and managing conflicts in the organisation reduces the costs caused by problems and conflicts, which in turn alleviates the pressure to adjust finances and achieve cost savings.

5.5 Managing the DLCs

By supporting, helping and encouraging, the manager influences positively the employees' and work communities' willingness to learn and develop as well as their wellbeing and productivity. The background mechanism is related to intrinsic motivation and the basic needs of individuals to have control over their work. In the organisational context, the employees have a basic need to get from their managers independence, approval, appreciation and a sense of safety. Managers face a tremendous challenge when they attempt to utilise employees' knowing, learning capacity and intrinsic motivation in a manner that is beneficial for the employees, for themselves and

for the organisation's goals and productivity objectives. Table 5 summarises the most critical variables related to managing the DLCs.

Table 5. The most critical variables of managing the DLCs.

Managing/supervising	Percentages of respondents (%)
Is present and listens to all employees equally	53%
Is fair and just	57%
Has large/strong leadership and management competencies (e.g. finance, administration, organisation or human resources)	57%
Is satisfactorily open with information flow	57%
Is genuinely interested in employees' ideas about development	59%
Is an example to employees	60%
Promoting participation	
Enables influence and participation	54%
Encourages employees with regard to learning and workplace development	60%
Promoting knowing	
Supports realisation of employees' ideas about development and knowledge sharing	55%
Gives constructive feedback	59%
Informs openly about working place issues	61%
Gives positive feedback	66%
Social interacting and supporting	
Encourages employees to develop and use creativity in work	51%
Supports social relationships	52%
Supports personnel in various change and development situations	55%
Takes care of employees' wellbeing and supports people's ability to cope	56%
Deals quickly with conflicts and solves them	57%
Supports interaction in the workplace	58%
Supports positive climate and interaction in the workplace	58%
Supports sharing of knowing	59%
Supports learning new things at work	60%

These results related to managing/supervising are critical from the point of view of generating, facilitating and nurturing DLCs. Vertical and horizontal information flow within the work community, especially between the managers and the employees, is an important variable, which affects productivity and the quality of working life. If the employees do not get enough open and real-time information, it causes many problems. Open information flow and communication are also the main factors for achieving genuine dialog. Being fair and just and supporting and taking care of employees' wellbeing are especially critical managerial factors when promoting learning, dialog, productivity and wellbeing.

6. CONCLUSIONS

According to our theoretical framework, if there are certain structures of high performance, collaboration and employee involvement in organisations, DLCs promote productivity and quality of working life. The most important structures are those of power and responsibilities, participation, communication, employee influence, management and development. At their best, DLCs are forums for improving, innovativeness and renewal by reorganising the work processes and organisation as well as utilising collective sense making and reflection.

Working places are considered potential and versatile learning contexts, and a great potential for learning and development is identified. However, in practice, opportunities for learning and development are limited (Tikkamäki, 2006). The main tasks for employers and managers are coordinating learning processes and securing equal possibilities to participate for employees. The challenge for employers and managers is to create structure and resources for DLCs that take into consideration the learning and development needs of the employees and groups as well as the strategic goals and economic resources of the organisation. Enabling participation and commitment to participate, constructing and sharing knowledge, socially supporting and taking care of workers' wellbeing as well as reflecting on experiences, practices and processes are seen as relevant tools for promoting organisational learning processes. As a learning strategy, dialog provides an opportunity for working together to generate a new and richer understanding about the issues and problems at hand (Syvänen, 2008; Syvänen & Loppela, 2013a, 2013b).

Development and learning based on generative dialog requires an open and confidential conversation culture; capabilities for dialog; clear recognition of and sharing of the organisation's goals, values, and equality; awareness of the learning objectives and critical reflection that relates to the prevailing modes of thinking, operation and routines. The realisation of such objectives requires organisational structure and a culture that respects human growth and development while simultaneously being able to organise the work processes in a manner that serves such activities. The organisation culture may be permissible or compulsive; encouraging people to participate, learn and develop or designating people to obey the predetermined instructions. This will also influence the kinds of roles people as workers and learners will take – an active doer or a passive follower (Tikkamäki, 2006).

Dialogic communities of learning are critical 'tools' for capturing and utilising all of the versatile potential of creativity and innovativeness as well as increasing the productivity and quality of working life. The benefits and the effectiveness of the DLCs can also be measured in money. The results indicated that not all of the organisational potentials and resources for creativity, innovativeness and learning are being fully utilised in the workplaces. To create value, the challenge for employers and managers is to apply their own as well as employees' vast and hidden learning potential.

Economic resources are wasted because organisations do not have enough knowledge and understanding about the significance and power of dialogic leadership and

organisational learning. Organisations should integrate DLCs into their economic and strategic objectives and work practices as well as allocate and invest sufficient resources to plan, establish, coordinate and facilitate DLCs. Strengthening of organisations' actors; understanding of the impacts and effectiveness of collaboration, employee involvement, influence, participation and dialog to creativity; innovations, productivity and quality of working life are also needed. These are the main reasons for the organisations and their management to subsequently legitimate, nurture and care for DLCs.

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