

ABSTRACT

DIALOGICAL LEADERSHIP AS A FACTOR OF INNOVATIVENESS

Theoretical starting points, research questions and the planned realization of a new research program

The research program on dialogical leadership is launched as part of an activation initiative of Tekes, the Finnish funding agency for technology and innovation. The initiative aims to find out ways in which work organizations can gain sustainable competitive advantage from the employees' activeness, creativity and innovativeness by developing their functioning and leadership behaviours. The research program is coordinated by the Management School of the University of Tampere, and docent, PhD Sirpa Syvänen acts as the program's scientific director. The research program is carried out as a collaborative enterprise between the University of Tampere, Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences, Tampere University of Technology and the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health. The Tekes-funded research program will be realized during the years 2012-2014.

The research program aims to create a general framework for dialogical leadership by combining together various theories of creativity, innovativeness, learning, motivation and leadership. This framework can be used to identify the preconditions, hindrances and catalysts of organizational creativity and innovativeness. The operational environments of workplaces are changing with an accelerating pace, and therefore the participation of employees with different experimental and skill backgrounds into the renewal of processes, products and services has become increasingly important when organizations try to attain sustainable competitive advantages. The central principles of dialogical leadership are appreciative interaction, listening and equal participation of different groups of employees into the development of activities. The aim is to encourage the whole personnel to use and develop their expertise to support innovative activities. Dialogical leadership aims to utilise also the views and expertise of customers when organizations are striving towards new innovations.

Dialogical leadership provides an opportunity to reconcile the needs of the organization and its employees. At the same time as it creates a firm ground for the organization's capacities for renewal, it offers the necessary preconditions for employee wellbeing, skill development and the enhancement of work capability.

The research program is carried out in close collaboration with the participating organizations. The objects of research represent a wide variety of industries and employing sectors. Among them are private, state, local government and parish workplaces e.g. in Helsinki, Tampere, North Karelia, Savo, Kainuu and Southern Ostrobothnia. The research will produce practical solutions and tools to the needs of participating organizations, and based upon them innovative operational models will be developed to serve more widely these whole Finnish working life.

The report aims to make public our theoretical background discussions, the key research questions and the overall design of the various subprojects. We hope that the report will help us to build collaboration with other actors working at present with similar kinds of problems.