

DEMOCRATIC DIALOGUE AND EQUALITY – PROMOTERS AND OBSTACLES WHILE CO-OPERATIVELY DEVELOPING ORGANISATIONS

Syvänen, S¹ and Loppela, K²

¹ School of Management, University of Tampere

² Seinäjoki University of applied Sciences, Koskenalantie 16, 60220 Seinäjoki, Finland
kaija.loppela@seamk.fi

In this article it is described the main factors either preventing or promoting democratic dialogue in the organisations. The results are based on the participatory action researches in Finnish organizations. Nature of the research was research assisted and concept driven change. The equal participation of all involved parties has been supported by the principles of democratic dialogue. As a learning strategy, democratic dialogue helps people to find new ideas that they would not have been able to develop alone (generative dialogues). Democratic dialogue provides also an opportunity to generate a new and richer understanding about the issues and problems at hand.

Keywords: democratic dialogue, participatory action research, promoters and obstacles of equal participation, research-assisted development

1 Introduction

This paper presents one thematic part of the *Dialogic Leadership Promoting Innovativeness* -Dinno-research programme 2012 – 2014 (www.dinno.fi). Programme is a multidisciplinary research combining theories concerning performance, quality of working life, creativity, innovations, learning, motivation and leadership. (Syvänen et al. 2012; Syvänen & Tikkamäki 2013; Syvänen & Loppela 2013) The roots of writers' common theoretical framework lie in administrative science and organisational economic (Syvänen 2003, 2010), adult education and work psychology (Loppela 2004). Dialogic and co-operative development models of analysed participatory action research projects (during 2005 - 2012, totally 37 projects) are basing on following approaches, theories and dialogic development methods:

1. organisational economic X-efficiency theory (Leibenstein 1987; Syvänen 2010);
2. the employees' self-evaluation (Loppela 2004; the development model called *Development of working community based on the employees' self-evaluation*);
3. dialogic decision-making and dialogic leadership theory (Isaacs 1999);
4. participatory action research, democratic dialogue and process evaluation (Habermas 1989; Gustavsen 1992; Syvänen 2003, 2008, 2010; Loppela 2004; Syvänen & Loppela 2013) and
5. concept-driven change (Gustavsen et al. 1996; Syvänen 1999) and research-assisted development (Kalliola et al. 2008; Syvänen 2008, 2010; Loppela 2004).

These theoretical models and assumptions were used in the development work while conceptualising and understanding the phenomena of productivity, quality of working life, and cooperation, and in formulating the link between them. *X-efficiency theory* combines co-operation, quality of working life and performance (Leibenstein 1987; Syvänen 2008, 2010; Syvänen & Loppela 2013) and underlines the vertical and hori-

zontal relationships between actors. Vertical collaboration means interaction and guidance relationships between managers and employees. Horizontal relationships comprise group behaviour and co-operation between various workplace communities, teams and professional groups. In vertical co-operation and interaction, appreciation, feedback, support, autonomy, participation, influencing and information flow are the key factors in improving performance and well-being. The most important theoretical framework of Loppela's model lies in theories of well-being and work capacity (Mäkitalo & Palonen 1994), motivation (Lawler 1982; Deci & Ryan 2000; Herzberg 1968), reflection in learning and tacit knowledge (Dewey 1933; Mezirow 1995; Nonaka & Takeuchi 1995). Working capacity and well-being are seen as comprehensive, systematic and context-bound phenomena. Working capacity, well-being and the efficacy of the workplace consist of working conditions and health factors; the work community and its social climate; and the employees' resources.

The action researches have been carried out in Finnish public (municipalities, state, parishes) and private organisations representing social and health services, sports and recreation, youth services, technical and ICT services, meals and cleaning services, central administration, culture and education services, universities and parishes. In these action research projects, the equal participation of all involved parties has been supported by the principles of *democratic dialogue*. These consist of the following 13 principles of discussion that should be observed by all those participating in the development (Habermas 1989; Gustavsen 1992): 1. Discussion consists of interaction; claims and counter-claims are allowed, 2. All those concerned must be allowed to participate, 3. The possibility of participating is not enough; everyone must participate, 4. The team members are equal discussion partners regardless of their official or other position, 5. The contribution to the discussion is based on personal work experience, 6. The starting-point is that the experiences presented by the participants are regarded as true, 7. All must be capable of understanding what is being discussed, 8. All grounds presented for the matters discussed will be regarded as justified, 9. The discussions will only deal with the views and grounds presented by the participants, 10. Each participant must accept that the grounds presented by someone else can be discussed, 11. The tasks or official or other position of anyone can be discussed, 12. Tolerance for different views must increase and 13. The dialogue must generate joint understanding, which will serve as a basis for practical activity.

In his theory of *dialogic leadership and dialogic decision making*, Isaacs presents four development stages or "containers" of dialogue, which are also the spaces for voicing, listening, respecting (appreciative interaction), and suspending. Containers are polite monologue, skilful conversation, reflective dialogue and generative dialogue. In the fourth container, the nature of the dialogue between the various participants is a fruitful ground for flow, creativity, innovations, wellbeing and performance.

2 Objectives

The objective of this article is to describe the main factors that are either promoting or preventing dialogical and co-operative development of the quality of working life and performance.

3 Materials and methods

Various dialogic development methods and tools as well as data-collecting methods were used. The main methods were process evaluation, multi professional development groups, work conferences, workshops and learning cafes and thematic questionnaires.

4 Findings: The promoters and the obstacles of democratic dialogue and co-operative development

Following results (promoters and obstacles) are basing on 1. the analysis of final reports of the action research projects, 2. qualitative self-evaluation of the local actors (top and middle managers and superiors, employees and trade union representatives) and outside experts (3 action researchers, 6 workplace developers and 1 trade union workplace developer (further outside expert). Earlier represented principles of the democratic dialogue (Gustavsen 1992) together with dialogic leadership and dialogic decision-making theory (Isaacs 1999) are used as the interpretative framework of the results.

1. Interaction and debatt

Promoters of democratic dialogue	Obstacles of democratic dialogue
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Good interaction and communication between different participants: employers, employees, professional groups, politicians, outside experts. -Voicing, listening, conversations and discussions -Trust, openness and safety among all who are involved 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Stress and burnout of employees linked to physical and psychological insecurity -Serious social and interaction problems -Inflamed workplace atmosphere -Atmosphere of mistrust and insecurity, envy and suspicion

2. Right and responsibility to participate

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Co-operative development structure and development methods and sessions – reflective thinking and learning - Good interaction and communication between different participants; employers, employees, professional groups outside experts etc. - Commitment of all participants: employers, managers, professionals, employees, politicians, outside experts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Turnover of key actors during development project and change process (especially managers and professionals) - Difficulties for all key actors in a large/big organisation to be listened and to be participated by the employer - Unclear role of middle managers in the development work - Lack of commitment and motivation among managers and employees, passive key actors (especially leaders) and poor participation of employees - Active and passive change resistance on the part of both managers and employees - Staff does not take responsibility for the development of wellbeing
--	---

3. Equality regardless the position, tasks and positions can be discussed

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Voicing, asking, listening, respecting, suspending, conversations - Co-operative development structure and development methods and sessions – reflective thinking and learning; outside expert helping to create 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Confused power and responsibility relationships and division of labour - Use of power and subjugation, power struggles - Task-centred work and routines, unpro-
---	---

<p>structures and using dialogical development methods</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Genuine commitment of the employers, managers, professionals and employees - Equality, justice, appreciation - Clarifying the responsibility and power structures and relationships - Dialogues concerning various rules and principles of workplace and work 	<p>professional work behaviour</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Impossible for all the actors in a large/big organisation to be listened and participated by employer
---	--

4. Participants' experiences are regarded as true, dialogue based on work experience

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use of various competences, skills and knowledge of the local participants; use of outside expert (action researcher, workplace developer) - Voicing, listening, asking, respecting, suspending, conversations, discussions - Multiple professional groups - Problem solving, conflict management: safe dialogues concerning problems, conflicts and difficult issues, constructive feedback 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Problems in solving conflicts: old and perennial problems, deficits in conflict management, challenged individuals, culture of non-interference
---	---

5. Views and arguments by participants, all arguments are justified, others' arguments are accepted, tolerance of different views

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Equality, justice, appreciation - Voicing, listening, respecting, suspending - Safe dialogues concerning problems, conflicts and difficult issues - Constructive feedback - Reflective thinking - Use of various competences, skills and knowledge; help and competences/skills of outside expert - Good interaction and communication between different participants; employers, employees, professional groups, outside expert etc. - Utilisation of diversity, taking and getting new perspectives, generating ideas and innovations - Dialogues concerning values, rules and principles of workplace and work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The diversity and range of human knowledge is not used as a resource of renewal and development - Lack of an overall view - Problems of basic tasks, goals (lack of goals, unclear goals) - Poor client orientation, inappropriate work behaviour => conflicting working ideologies and principles => need to make the mutual rules and joint principles - Excessive permissiveness, over loyalty, culture of non-interference - "Improper development objectives" = motives and interests of the "outsiders" (for example the trade union representatives)
---	--

6. Ability to understand what is being discussed, generate joint understanding and practical activity

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Theoretical framework and outside experts bring deeper understanding about individual, group and organisational factors affecting performance, quality of working life and client-oriented thinking (quality of services, basic tasks) - Reflective thinking and learning - The central principles of dialogic development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Different language, difficult and professional concepts - The lack of an overall view.
--	---

6 Discussion

Reflection means that individuals, groups and organisations have the ability to suspend, evaluate and question their own thinking and acting (*reflecting and suspending*). Reflective processes, generative dialogues and democratic dialogue mean it is possible to evaluate work, work behaviour, structures and processes of the organisations alone and together. One of the challenges for organisations is to connect individual and collective processes in appreciative and equal ways (*respecting*) in order to evaluate various participants' different aims, motives and interests. Another challenge is to establish reflective thinking and organisational and dialogic learning processes as a natural part of working processes and as a part of everyday working (Boud et.al 2006). If there is no reflective thinking and learning on the individual and collective levels of organisations, people work routinely and lack any critical analysis of working and managing styles (Dewey 1933; Mezirow 1995; Syvänen 2010). It is important to listen deeply (*listening*) to the ideas of others and to question one's own views (*suspending*). The aim is to find the best possible interpretation that provides a basis as a ground for decision making (*dialogical decision making*). As a learning strategy, democratic dialogue helps people to find new ideas that they would not have been able to develop alone (*generative dialogues*). Dialogue provides also an opportunity to generate a new and richer understanding about the issues and problems at hand. Such reflective and generative dialogues (Isaacs 1999) can emerge only in groups in which people are equal and trust each other (Gustavsen 1992) and the climate and atmosphere is open and safe. Schein (1988) and Isaacs (1999) stress the significance of authentic listening, responsible voicing, mutual respecting, empathy and participation in collaborative learning. Reaching mutual understanding enables problem solving at the same time as it helps a group to develop its members' interactive skills and co-operative relationships (Adler 1992).

References

- Adler, P. 1992. Institutions and Incentives for Developing Work-Related Knowledge and Skill. In Adler, P. (ed.) Technology and the Future of Work. Oxford University Press: USA.
- Boud, D., Cressey, P., Docherty, P. 2006. Productive reflection at work: Learning for changing organizations.
- Deci, E. L., Ryan, R.M. 2000. Self-determination Theory and the Facilitation of Intrinsic Motivation, Social Development and Wellbeing. *American Psychologist* 55. 68-78.
- Dewey, J. 1933. How We Think. A Restatement of the Relation of Reflective Thinking to the Educative process. Qualitative data analysis. A User-friendly Guide for Social Scientists. London: Routledge.
- Gustavsen, B. 1992. Dialogue and Development. *Social Science for Social Action: Toward Organizational Renewal*. Volume 1. Stockholm: Arbetslivs centrum & Assen: Van Gorcum.
- Gustavsen, B., Ekman, M., Hofmaier, B. 1996. Concept-driven change: The core element in national workplace development and program. Concept and transformation. Vol. No. 2/3. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamin's Publishing Company.
- Habermas, J. 1989. The structural transformation of the public sphere: an inquiry into a category of bourgeois society. Cambridge, Mass. MIT Press.
- Herzberg, F. 1968. One More Time: How Do You Motivate Employees? *Harvard Business Review*, 46 (Jan.-Feb.), 53-62.

- Isaacs, W. 1999. Dialogue and the Art of Thinking. A Pioneering approach to Communication. Business and in Life. Currency: USA.
- Kalliola, S., Lehtonen, J. 2008. Dialogue in Working Life Research and Development in Finland. New York: Peter Lang, 159-180. (Labour, Education & Society 13).
- Lawler, E.E. III 1982. Increasing Worker Involvement to Enhance Organizational Effectiveness. In Goodman, P.S. et al. Change in Organizations. New Perspectives on Theory, Research, and Practice. San Francisco.
- Leibenstein, H. 1987. Inside the Firm: The Inefficiencies of Hierarchy. Harvard University Press.
- Loppela, K. 2004. Ihminen ja työ –keskustellen työkuuntoon. Työyhteisön kehittäminen työkykyä ylläpitävän toiminnan viitekehyksessä. [Development of the Work Community Based on the Employees' Self evaluation]. Doctoral dissertation, adult education. University of Tampere.
- Mäkitalo, J., Palonen, J. 1994. Mitä on työkyky: Lääketieteellinen, tasapainomallin mukainen ja integroitu käsitystyyppi. Työ ja ihminen, 8:3, 155-163.
- Mezirow, J. 1995. Transformative Theory of Adult Learning. In Welton, M. (ed.) In Defense of the Lifeworld. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Nonaka, I., Takeuchi, H. 1995. The Knowledge - Creating Company. How Japanese Companies Create the Dynamics of Innovation. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Schein, E. 1988. Organizational psychology. Prentice-Hall International Editions. New Jersey: Englewood Cliffs.
- Syvänen, S. 2010. Evil Eleven Syndrome. Dark Side of Workplaces. Pressures at Work and Costs of Non-interference, Doctoral dissertation 2003, University of Tampere, School of Management. VDM Verlag Dr. Saarbrücken: Müller Aktiengesellschaft & Co. Doctoral dissertation, local government economics, University of Tampere.
- Syvänen, S. 2008. Development Organizations and Dialogues among Services for Elderly. In Kalliola, S., Lehtonen, J. (eds.): Dialogue in Working Life Research and Development in Finland. Labour, Education & Society. New York, Bern, Berlin, Brussels, Frankfurt am Main, Oxford, Wien: Peter Lang.
- Syvänen, S. 1999. Developing Municipal Services for the Aged. The Role of Participatory Action Research and Concept Driven Change. 29-58. In Kalliola, S., Nakari, R. (eds.) Resources for Renewal. A Participatory Approach to the Modernization of Municipal Organizations in Finland. John Benjamin's Publishing Company. Dialogues on Work and Innovation: 10.
- Syvänen, S., Kasvio, A., Loppela, K., Lundell, S., Tappura, S., Tikkamäki, K. 2012. Dialogic Leadership as a Factor of Innovativeness. Theoretical starting points, research questions and the planned realisation of the Dinno-programme. Työterveyslaitos, Tietoa työstä. Helsinki: Printservice Oy.
- Syvänen, S., Loppela, K. 2013. Dialogic development and leadership promoting productivity, quality of working life and learning. Proceedings of ABRS 2013, Venice.
- Syvänen, S., Tappura, S., Kasvio, A., Loppela, K., Lundell, S., Tikkamäki, K. 2012. Dialogic leadership promoting sustainable working life and innovativeness. In Antonsson et.al (ed.) Proceedings of NES 2012, Stockholm: KTH.
- Syvänen, S., Tikkamäki, K. 2013. Dialogic Leadership and ICT-intensive Workplaces How to Enhance Learning Potential? In Ley, T., Ruohonen, M., Laanpere, M., Tatnell, A. (eds.). Open and Social Technologies for Networked Learning. OST 2012. Revised Selected Papers, 69-77. Heidelberg, Dordrecht, London, New York: Springer.