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On Participative Democracy¹

It is fifty years ago today that Cleveringa gave his impressive and courageous speech in which he protested on behalf of the Faculty of Law against the dismissal of his Jewish mentor and colleague, Meijers. It was the start of the persecution of the Jews in the Netherlands. A process in which over one hundred thousand Jewish Netherlanders would ultimately meet their deaths in the extermination camps of Auschwitz and Sobibor. It formed an integral part of the systematic eradication of the European Jewish culture and of the murder of six million Jewish men, women and children.

We know all this, you and I. The Holocaust is now, for us, an historical fact. This knowledge is not, however, a simple matter. De Jong has shown that statements and testimony in the years 1942 and 1943 about what was happening in Eastern Europe were not believed, despite the fact that they were based on precise and detailed knowledge of the extermination process in camps such as Auschwitz--Birkenau (de Jong, 1967). It was simply beyond comprehension. One could not imagine it.

Today, fifty years later, we still have great difficulty in believing what Nazi Germany has brought about. We cannot understand how it was possible that the greatest deliberate crime history has known could take place so recently at the center of European civilization. We cannot find a good explanation for it.

Dahrendorf's statement in 1955, "I believe that for the time being this question transcends the horizons of scientific explanation; it is too close and too overwhelming to be studied *sine ira et studio*" (Dahrendorf, 1969) still seems valid in 1990.

¹Inaugural address given on acceptance of the position of professor in the psychological, organisational and societal significance of participative democracy, in respect of the Cleveringa Chair, University of Leiden, 26th November, 1990.

This horrifying wholesale destruction of human life and European culture has been characterized by Dawidowics (1981) as:

The murder of the six million Jews, in its unparalleled scope, devastating effect, and incomprehensible intent, overtook the capacity of man's imagination to conceive evil.... The names of the death factories, and especially the name Auschwitz, replaced Dante's Nine Circles of Hell as the quintessential epitome of evil, for they were located not in the literary reaches of the medieval religious imagination, but in the political reality of twentieth century Europe."

Hannah Arendt (1963) speaks about "...the totality of the moral collapse the Nazis caused in respectable European society--not only in Germany but in all countries, not only among the persecutors but also among the victims."

It is not my intention to examine the causal complexity of the Holocaust, the connection between such factors as German nationalism, anti-Semitism, the symbiosis between Hitler and the German people and the ideology of National Socialism and the way in which these developments can be placed in the context of German history. I wish instead to draw attention to the organizational aspects of the Holocaust. We see here a bureaucratic organization of continental proportions which brought together people from all the corners of Europe in order to kill them by means of a conveyor belt technology (Hilberg, 1985). Never before were the principles and methods of rational organization used on this scale to accomplish the irrational and the demonic.

The uniqueness of the Nazi genocide lies to a large extent in the administrative sphere. The Holocaust could not have taken place without the application of the principles of classical scientific management. It required detailed planning and meticulous implementation according to specified

criteria of efficiency and effectiveness, and made use of a carefully selected technology developed specially for the purpose. It was made possible by an infrastructure consisting of thousands of bureaucrats, technicians, police officers, military personnel and scientists, and by an ongoing cooperation between government bodies. Standardized procedures, a far-reaching functional division of labor and hierarchical coordination and control constituted the administrative organizational characteristics.

The extermination process comprised the following stages:

- Definition of a Jew

- Identification

- Dismissal as an employee and confiscation of businesses

- Local concentration

- Transport

- Labor and extermination camps

- Gassing

- Confiscation of personal belongings.

By splitting the process into a series of separate tasks, one created a physical, social and psychological distance between the individual act and the outcome of the process. One loses sight of the whole, one is "alienated" from the "product."

In the bureaucratic organization with its segmented structures and processes in which superficiality and dissociation are fostered, the moral

significance of the individual act is greatly reduced. There is a shift from a moral to a technical responsibility in which the individual task is regarded not so much as a means but as an end in itself. The most important criterion then becomes whether the task is performed with the best available technical knowledge and whether the result is economically justified. To quote Bauman (1989):

...bureaucracy is not merely a tool, which can be used with equal facility at one time for cruel and morally contemptible, at another for deeply human, purposes. Even if it does move in any direction in which it is pushed, bureaucracy is more like a loaded dice. It has a logic and a momentum of its own.... It is programmed to measure the optimum in such terms as would not distinguish between one human object and another, or between human and inhuman objects. What matters is efficiency and lowering of costs of their processing.

The Holocaust is both a product of modern society and a manifestation of its failure. It is a demonstration of what is possible when a techno-bureaucratic rationality is associated with an ideology such as National Socialism.

For a long time one believed that there was a connection between the cruelties of the Nazi regime and the personalities of the people involved in it; Nazism was cruel because Nazis were cruel, and Nazis were cruel because cruel people tended to become Nazis. The experiments by Milgram have, however, shown that, in general, this is certainly not true. In these experiments a number of subjects were instructed to administer electric shocks, ranging in strength from mild to very powerful and possibly dangerous, to an innocent person. Quite astonishingly, this instruction was obeyed by the great majority of the subjects. Since then, a good many similar experiments have been conducted, including one by Meeus and Raaijmakers (1984)

in the Netherlands, which confirm Milgram's findings

The great importance of these studies is that they show that obedience is rooted in the daily life of the ordinary, modern individual. For this reason Hannah Arendt (1963) called her report on the Eichmann trial "A report on the banality of evil." It is apparent that people are quick to accept the ideological legitimation of a particular instruction by an impersonal power and thus are willing to perform the task. The "natural" inclination to obey and the requirements and characteristics of the bureaucratic organization confirm and reinforce each other. Together they form a powerful combination which, in the service of a perfidious ideology, acquires a satanic significance.

The New Organization Paradigm

After the war, the search began for new forms of working organization. Economic, social, political and technological considerations played a role in this process, which was driven by the requirements of organizational effectiveness as well as by an increasing demand for greater participation in business management. This need for organizational innovation prompted the development of a new concept of organizations which differed to such an extent from the existing one, both theoretically and operationally, that we can speak of a new organization paradigm. This new paradigm is the result of a change in the choice of design principles. The theoretical point of departure is based on open-system thinking and is concerned, in particular, with the significance of the adaptive capability of social systems. To be able to pursue their objectives, organizations must be able to adapt to a wide variety of changing circumstances. However, adaptation is possible only if the organization has built overcapacity into its system. There are two ways in which this can be done (Emery, 1977):

- By adding extra parts to the system--overcapacity of parts--or

- By increasing the capacity of the individual parts--overcapacity of functions.

Overcapacity of parts is based on a mechanistic concept of the organization in which the individual is seen as an object, a replaceable part of a machine. Work processes are being managed by means of external coordination and control. Overcapacity of functions, on the other hand, recognizes the multiple capabilities of the individual and regards him foremost as a subject, as a societal resource to be developed. The work process is being managed by means of internal coordination and control.

The effectiveness of an organization is determined by the way in which it deals with two highly interdependent and crucial relationships:

- The relationship between the organization and its various environments (i.e., the open system characteristics) and, following from that,
- The internal relationship between the human system and the technology (i.e., the socio-technical system).

The choice between overcapacity of parts and overcapacity of functions is a choice between two totally different value systems and results in two very different forms of logic and hence very different ways of defining, understanding and managing these relationships. Overcapacity of parts leads to a bureaucratic and autocratic system constructed from the building blocks of the segmented individual task which has a limited capacity for adaptation. On the other hand, organizations based on the principle of overcapacity of functions form democratic structures which have as building blocks self-managing, autonomous work groups and thus have a built-in capacity for active adaptation.

If the costs of the parts are low and the changes in the

environment occur in such a way that the organization has plenty of time to adjust to them, the choice of overcapacity of parts can be justified from a techno-economic point of view. If, however, individual parts are expensive (e.g., trained staff) or highly valued and the organization is in a complex and rapidly changing environment, alertness and capacity to learn are the organizational attributes which are crucial to survival. Overcapacity of functions is then the only choice.

The theoretical background to the new forms of working organization and the difference between the old and the new paradigms are a constant subject of debate in the social sciences and will not be dealt with further here. The new organization paradigm is based on the principle of the overcapacity of functions in which the adaptation of the organization is based on the capacity for active adaptation of the individual and in which the democratization of work is integrated with the economic objectives of the organization. We see here the organizational expression of participative democracy as a result of which individual freedom and equality can be expressed within the economic objectives of the socio-technical system. The new form of working organization enables the production process to be arranged in such a way that the individual, in cooperation with others, is personally and actively involved in local decision-making. By linking personal responsibility and autonomy with the opportunity for learning and self-development, the organization establishes a correlation between the principles of democracy and the economic objectives of the business.

Developments

The developments in this field of workplace reform and development can be sketched by reference to a number of milestones (Emery, 1989):

- The first milestone was the well-known experiments conducted in 1938 and 1939 by Lewin, Lippitt and White (1939) into the effect

of differing styles of management--autocratic, democratic and laissez-faire--on the social climate.

- The second was the emergence of autonomous groups in British coal mines in the 1950s and the subsequent experiment conducted in the Bolsover mine by members of the Tavistock Institute in London (Trist and Bamforth, 1951; Wilson, 1951; Trist et al., 1963). These studies showed the crucial importance of the interdependence between technology and people for the design of the working process. It marked the beginning of socio-technical system analysis and of the conceptualization of the business as an open socio-technical system.
- The Norwegian Industrial Democracy Project which took place in the late 1960s and early 1970s can be regarded as the third milestone. It was both an intensive conceptual study and a practical exploration of the democratization of work by means of a series of experiments (Emery and Thorsrud, 1976). The project produced two results: first, it emerged that the different forms of representative democracy had no influence on the participation of workers in the workplace and, second, the results of field experiments proved that it was possible to redesign existing workplaces along the lines of the principles of participative democracy as well as in accordance with the economic objectives of the business.
- The fourth milestone was formed by a significant change of a methodological nature which took place in the 1970s with the development of the participative design workshop and the search conference (Emery, 1982, 1989). The structure of the participative design workshop is based on the idea that instead of

being dependent on external experts for socio-technical analyses and choices, workers and their immediate managers have the right and the competence to organize their workplace themselves. During the workshop the participants redesign their work situation with the help of a number of simple conceptual tools. Furthermore, they do so in such a way that they are at the same time able to gain experience of working within a democratic structure. The search conference is a form of participative planning with a broad range of applications. This method, which allows a social system to position itself in an active adaptive mode vis-a-vis its environment, can be used for almost all forms of planning, policy formulation and other future-oriented activities. The theoretical assumptions underlying the organization of the search conference and the design workshop include the conditions for effective communication as developed by Asch (1952).

- The present Swedish LOM program (LOM being an acronym for management, organization and participation) is an illustration of an emerging fifth milestone in this development. Launched in 1985 and involving over 50 organizations, the program is the result of an agreement between the two sides of industry and is characterized by its broad basis and large-scale network-based strategy. The guiding principle of the program, both conceptually and operationally, is formed by a communication-based democratic theory known as democratic dialogue (Gustavsen, 1985, 1989).

This brief review gives an indication of the nature of the shifts that have taken place since the war in the search for more effective and democratic forms of working organization. On the conceptual level, we see a shift from

- An initially socio-psychological orientation towards
- A socio-technical approach, followed by
- A strategy in which the conditions for effective communication and democratic dialogue are emphasized as a prerequisite for effective ongoing development (Asch, 1952; Emery, M., 1982; Emery, F., 1989; Gustavsen, 1985).

On the methodological and operational level, there has been a similar shift from:

- Organizational redesign which is based on a detailed, step-by-step socio-technical analysis carried out by external experts towards
- Organizational redesign which is carried out by workers and management, using their knowledge and experience and in which the experts, if any, have only a supportive role, followed by
- An open large-scale process of redesign based on a network approach and democratic dialogue.

These developments reflect a process of increasing contextualization in which a previous orientation is included in a subsequent one.

Since the 1950s we have seen a steady increase in different participative forms of working organization. Many examples can be given from both the private and the public sectors in North America, Western Europe and other parts of the world (Emery and Thorsrud, 1976; Kolodny and van Beinum, 1983; Gustavsen, 1985; van Beinum, 1986). Because of pressure from the global economy and the requirements of modern technology, there is an increasing receptivity to the link between the adaptability and effectiveness of the

enterprise and the democratization of its organization. Nevertheless, the situation is rather confusing and cannot be easily explained by simple causal connections. There are encouraging developments but at the same time it is clear that the process is moving very slowly. It is encountering many difficulties. Many approaches have been confined to changes of a local nature and the majority of attempts at organizational renewal take place in the context of the old paradigm (van Beinum, 1986). There is considerable resistance to the democratization of work despite the organizational logic, its economic relevance and the fact that it corresponds with the fundamental values of Western society. It looks as though the present irrational attitudes and ambivalent feelings towards this new form of organization are largely determined by the fact that we are at present in a field of forces which is formed, on the one hand, by the requirements of organizational flexibility and efficiency and, on the other, by feelings of fear and uncertainty about the consequences of introducing democratic structures and processes into industry.

I should now like to go further into the question of why we have difficulty with participative democracy in organizations. I will take as my starting point the nature of the behavioral variables which occur within an organization. We can assume that the behavior of people in an organization is determined by three types of variable--personality variables, the way in which roles are structured and the characteristics of the members of the organization as a collective, as an aggregate. Churchman and Emery (1966, Vol.III) pointed out that organizations have dual characteristics since they are a structure of roles and functions and, at the same time, a statistical collection of persons, an aggregate. The latter refers to the fact that the members of an organization are connected both as individuals and as groups with a large number of other organizations. In their multifarious organizational connectedness, the individuals in the organization together form a statistical collection, a social aggregate with its own characteristics, a separate internal environment which has the properties of a

dynamic field.

The great importance of the aggregate phenomenon is that it is along this dimension that the organization internalizes its societal environment. The state in which the social aggregate finds itself, its mood, its attitude and values, largely determines the scope for communication within the organization. Organizations manage their relationship with the social aggregate by means of the values which are inherent in their objectives and different policy spheres. The extent to which, for example, the new paradigm can develop in an organization will depend on the extent to which the values and principles of the participative democracy correspond with those of the social aggregate.

These three behavioral variables--the personality structure of the individual, the role in which he finds himself and the state of the social aggregate of which he is part--constitute, with their strong interdependencies, very powerful internal social and psychological pivotal points. They determine the behavior of the organization and represent the individual, organizational and societal dimensions of the social system. It is by reference to these dimensions, which can obviously not be clearly separated, that I shall arrange my observations with regard to some of the experience and lessons learned concerning the development of participative democracy. I shall begin by drawing attention to some aspects concerning the individual and then say something about the organizational and societal significance of these developments.

Psychological Aspects

The new organization paradigm creates work situations which require direct participation and personal involvement. Instead of the segmented work process, with its fragmented people and relationships, we see an emphasis on the development of the "complete" task which makes demands on the "whole" person. Self-management, on-going learning and a growing ability

to exert influence are the key characteristics of the new organizational design.

The result is a shift in the relationship between the individual and the organization. A shift which makes new demands not only of an intellectual but also of an emotional kind. In addition to the obvious difficulties on the rational level, there are unconscious fears and irrational attitudes which play an important role and which are often insufficiently recognized. The ambivalent attitude towards participative democracy is probably more closely connected with the psychological and cultural aspects of organizational change than with the technical and structural aspects of organizational design. The fear among certain groups in the organization of losing control and power is naturally an extremely important factor in this development. Yet it is by no means improbable that the ambivalence which we encounter is also a reflection of a more general phenomenon--a deep-rooted cultural and personality syndrome which Fromm (1942) identified as "the fear of freedom." Being free *from* does not necessarily mean that one feels free *to*.

Modern European and American history largely concerns the social, economic and political liberation of the individual. According to Fromm, however, this process has also liberated people from the ties of safety and security. Accordingly, the new freedom also gives rise to feelings of insecurity, fear and doubt. The individual must choose. He can rid himself of the burden of freedom by taking flight into new forms of dependence and subordination or he can continue to shape his newly found freedom in accordance with the uniqueness of his individuality. However, the latter requires an environment which allows for such a development to come from within the person. In organizational terms, this means that the work process must be designed around the principles of self-management and local autonomy. A major difficulty which arises in this connection lies in the fact that participative democracy has, by definition, an unfolding character and thus entails a certain measure of unpredictability. This is why this development

may be regarded as threatening, particularly in the design and transitional phase when unfamiliarity is accompanied by insufficient trust and lack of influence. The new mode of operation does not, after all, appear to provide the same safety as traditional bureaucracy.

Fear of the unknown is a universal phenomenon and probably has its origins in man's early history when the unknown usually signified danger. If this assumption is correct, we are dealing here with an example of conditioned behavior which has a pre-cultural basis. One wonders, therefore, to what extent the slow diffusion of direct industrial democracy has been due in part to a collusion between the fear of democracy and the safety provided by the old paradigm. This type of negative relationship can develop into an especially intractable vicious circle in circumstances in which the structure of the existing organization also serves as a defense mechanism against anxieties generated by the very same organization (Menzius, 1970). A situation can then arise in which people feel good about feeling bad. Hence it is of great importance that the process of change from the bureaucratic to the democratic structure should be designed and managed in such a way that psychological phenomena of this kind can receive the attention they require. This means that it should be a process in which people feel safe and in which they can get to know the external reality for what it really is while at the same time they have the opportunity to become aware of the nature of the internal reality.

The redesign workshop, the search conference and the Swedish LOM program to which I have referred earlier are all approaches which make it possible to face up to the paranoia and fear of what is new and to come to grips with them in the context of the democratization of the work process (Asch, 1952; Emery, 1989; Gustavsen, 1989).

Organizational Aspects

From an organizational point of view, one of the most general and

persistent problems is that, although there are many projects, little diffusion takes place. It would be naive to suppose that in this area a good example is likely to be followed. On the contrary, there are many examples of successful projects which have been simply encapsulated. One of the major lessons learned from the Norwegian experiments of the 1970s was that diffusion is not a linear process and that it does not take place along lines of simple causality. It became clear that the dissemination of new ideas and practices with regard to the design of organizations involves more than providing scientific evidence and making information available about successful empirical developments. Instead, it is a process in which there must be ample scope for direct active participation and for learning by experience in collaboration and interaction with other organizations. There must be an opportunity for "working through" which can only be done with and by means of other social systems.

It is strange that although we know that the demonstration experiment is of little significance for the diffusion of the new developments--information is not experience--it is nonetheless still frequently used as the main approach. The logic of the old paradigm is being used to prove that the new paradigm works, as a result of which one creates an even greater barrier to understanding the new form of work organization.

The democratization of the work process requires that democratic values and principles are expressed in both the structures and the processes and procedures of the organization. In that connection the developments in this field can be described with the help of a simple model in which a distinction is made for analytical purposes between the social processes and the structural characteristics of the organization and between the democratic and undemocratic properties of each of these two dimensions. In this way various types of organization can be distinguished.

First, there is the typical bureaucratic organization with its undemocratic processes and structures. This type is based on the design principle of overcapacity of parts and still represents a dominant orientation

in our society. The majority of working organizations fall into this category. The opposite type is based on the principle of overcapacity of functions, and is characterized both by democratic processes and by democratic structures which consist of self-regulating parts. In practice, however, the fully democratic organization is more of a compass bearing than an empirical category.

Organizations in which democratic processes are being developed but in which the organizational structures remain unchanged are a highly relevant category. Many organizational developments bearing a participative stamp are typified by this. They represent a form of parochial democracy and serve, in fact, to sustain the old paradigm. They promote participation but only in relation to certain situations designated for that purpose. Structural changes are not part of such approaches and the power structure is therefore not greatly influenced by these participative activities. The various forms of participative management and the popular quality circles are typical examples. As far as the democratization of work is concerned they are misleading developments and likely to cause disillusion and cynicism.

Another common type of organization is one in which democratic structures are being introduced but not through a democratic process. It is a form of enforced democracy, a *contradictio in terminis*. Participative structures are superimposed upon the organization from outside by experts as a form of social engineering. Usually, generalized and standardized solutions are being used in which situationally determined variables can only play a minor role. Under this approach workers are not involved in the fundamental decisions and there is little opportunity for effective organizational learning and for working through the process of change. In this kind of organization development effective descriptive and analytical methods such as classical socio-technical system analysis are frequently applied in one form or another. However, they are inappropriate as a strategy for effecting a process of integrated change of an organization. By reducing the organization to an object, they reduce themselves to no more than a reflection of the old

bureaucratic paradigm. In view of the pressure from today's economic and technological rationality, however, it is by no means improbable that this will become the dominant approach.

The democratization of work naturally extends much further than the design of work organizations as socio-technical systems. We are dealing here with a development which recognizes the organization as a "total institution." This orientation can be translated into a successful, practical organizational design only if the appropriate values underlying it are explicitly formulated. This is of critical importance for an organization which is to operate according to the principle of redundancy of functions.

Self-regulation and self-management can occur only if the social system has sufficient common values and objectives. Otherwise there are no guidelines for decision-making and there is insufficient willingness to cooperate. Hence it is essential that an organizational philosophy clarifying the values and objectives in an integrated manner is developed during the design process. In the transition from an existing bureaucracy to a democratic structure, it is not uncommon for those involved to conclude that the redesign cannot be confined to a reorganization of the structure but must be extended to the assumptions underlying the organization. In such cases, the redesign process then proceeds at two levels simultaneously, namely at the concrete level of rearranging the socio-technical components and at the abstract level of reformulating the ideas and value systems concerning the mission and objectives of the organization. The success of the redesign process at the concrete, operational level then depends to a large extent on the ability to redesign at the abstract level. Organizational developments in the field of health care and education provide striking examples of this phenomenon, the former because of the implications of the definition of the concept of health and the latter because of the problems resulting from the revision of views on the structure of knowledge.

Societal Aspects

The societal aspects are at present the most neglected dimension of participative democracy and are in urgent need of our attention. We live among, and by means of, a variety of organizations and maintain links with many different kinds of organization. Organizations are ubiquitous, not only because they are everywhere as actual operational social systems but also in view of the way organizational principles and organizational logic are part of the way we understand and manage our daily lives. They determine our view on such matters as the need for coordination and the meaning of control. Organizations form an essential link between the individual and society, they have a linking function. The values and the kind of ideas underlying the various organizations to which we belong have a not insignificant influence on the way in which we experience our work, our relations with others and, ultimately, ourselves. They play a major role in the way we position ourselves in society.

Any resistance within the organization to the new paradigm will therefore be based in part on the influences from outside. The values and various views relating to our organizational structures have been grounded in the course of history in a broad societal context. Understandably, therefore, the traditional bureaucratic organization paradigm is firmly anchored in our culture and still manifests itself in widely differing social settings. It follows, therefore, that in this development towards more democratic work organizations much greater attention will have to be paid to systems, processes and structures in our environment which affect the design and development of organizations but which are, in turn, themselves influenced by the new views on organizations. These "domains" represent views of an organizational kind as well as values. They are both cognitive and evaluative and occur at both the meso and macro levels. They are of a widely differing nature and have the characteristics of a complex social "field." They constitute phenomena of such a size, and have so many facets of a general,

societal importance, that they are beyond the range of action of the individual organization.

Examples include the areas of labor relations, education, women's rights, new technology, health and safety and regional developments. Each of these fields is based on assumptions which have an organizational significance. They are expressions of a societal orientation and involvement which contain a particular organizational logic. These domains affect the democratization of organizations in two ways--from the outside as a consequence of their interaction as a system with the organization and from the inside through the views and attitudes of the social aggregate through which the characteristics of these fields become internalized.

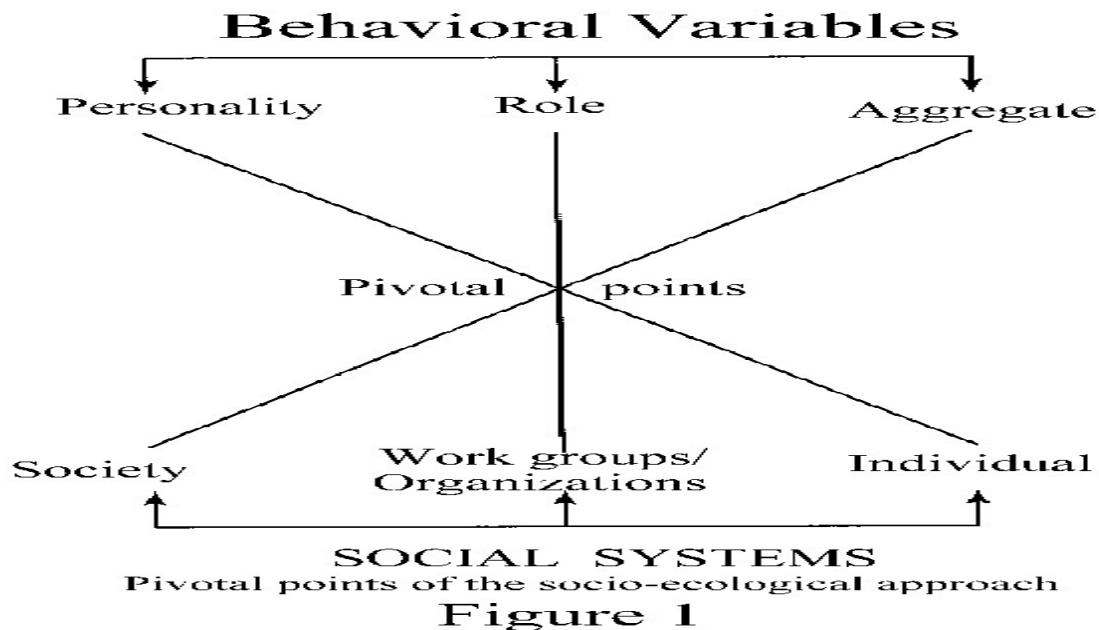
It has gradually become clear that in the processes of organizational design and development we cannot focus on the organization as such and regard the external environment simply as a series of circumstances which have an adverse or a beneficial effect. Organizations and their environment are complementary; they determine each other. It is not possible to describe the features of the one without characterizing the other. An organization can ultimately be defined only in terms of its environment. And, vice versa, an environment cannot be described without portraying the organizations it is an environment for.

Organizational change is therefore rooted in the interdependencies between the organization and its environment. Consequently, the unit of organizational change is not the organization as such but the organization in its environment and with its environment. This understanding represents a major development from both a conceptual and a methodological point of view (Sommerhoff, 1969; Emery, 1977). It signifies a shift from a socio-technical to a socio-ecological approach. The environment no longer acts as a background but forms an active part of the process of change. As a result, the connection between the intra-organizational and the inter-organizational processes can be underpinned in theory and deliberately incorporated and mobilized in practice.

The Socio-Ecological Approach

Involving both the organization and its environment, i.e., the socio-ecological approach, is a very significant step forward in the development of participative forms of work organization and can be considered as the next and sixth milestone in the evolving strategies for organizational renewal. It enables the three dimensions of the new organizational paradigm--the individual, the organizational and the societal--to become actively involved at two levels simultaneously; namely, as behavioral variables within the organization and as social systems in their societal context. In this way--and this is of critical importance--the organizational and the societal pivotal points of participative democracy, its micro and macro dimensions, are being connected and together can form a comprehensive and mutually reinforcing structure (Figure 1).

These socio-ecological systems will be of a widely differing nature. Their composition, structure, size and orientation will largely depend on local circumstances and commitment. The identification and mobilization of such a system is no simple matter and depends in large measure on the efforts of the participating organizations and their ability to create a common frame of reference in which the development of a new form of working organization is a major objective. It will be obvious that the quality of the leadership provided by management, unions and government is of critical importance in this connection.



Experiences in North America and Europe have shown that the development and diffusion of the democratization of organizations cannot take place without a clear involvement and commitment from those who are in a position of leadership. For instance, the demands that are made of management increase rather than decrease when democratic structures and processes evolve. When the self-regulating ability increases, the demands made of those in authority change. The manager must turn his attention mainly to the interface between local autonomy and strategic objectives. He is primarily concerned with matching the relationship between micro and macro, between system and environment. This requires, among other things, a capacity to understand other people's perspectives and an ability to exceed different views and visions. It presupposes, as van der Vlist (1991) suggests, an "intelligent but above all sensitive, democratic attitude." It is not sufficient if one only approves, supports or subscribes. Managers are involved here in a process of cultural change which can succeed only if they are willing and able to play an active role in it. This applies at all levels. A major stumbling block is that it entails a significant shift in the development and orientation of the manager. The new organization paradigm makes much greater

demands on the ability of the manager to understand the way in which he deals with new experiences, i.e., on his ability to become aware of the characteristics of his own learning process. Learning to learn will be the principal factor determining the competence of the manager in an adaptive and democratic organization.

In order to be effective the leadership process requires that the values and principles of participative democracy are also built into the various system objectives on the macro level and that they can be legitimately expressed in terms of their societal significance. Although the ubiquity of the bureaucratic paradigm, embedded in its Newtonian/Cartesian logic, in combination with the dominant position of representative democracy make this a difficult proposition at present, there are some hopeful developments. The mounting pressure coming from the global economy and new technology, such as the increasing need for adaptive and flexible structures in order to meet the criteria for effectiveness and efficiency, in combination with new thinking in such fields as health and safety, women's issues, planning and education give a new impetus to the basic values in Western society.

The socio-ecological approach with regard to the democratization of organizations represents a new strategy which is as yet not very far developed. Nonetheless, some examples may be cited of initiatives in this direction.

The well-known Jamestown project in western New York State in the 1970s is an early illustration of how local authorities, in cooperation with the two sides of industry, were able to create new structures and forms of cooperation in order to accomplish the socio-economic renewal of their town (Trist, 1981, Vol.III). Retraining programs were instituted as a result of consultation between industry and local education authorities and in-company labor-management committees were established to help implement projects aimed at redesigning existing work processes and enhancing participation. One of the unique aspects of the project was that intra-organizational processes and inter-organizational structures were linked together.

Another, more recent, example of a step in the direction of a socio-ecological approach can be found in the Swedish LOM program. The two sides of industry signed an agreement on "Participation and Efficiency" in 1982 in which work organization, technology and economic performance are placed in their mutual interdependencies. This agreement is a public statement of shared values and common understanding. It stresses the importance of a joint approach to problems in industry by employers and employees and the significance in this context of approaching problems in terms of a process of development and learning instead of through rules and inflexible structures. Productivity and participation are seen as overlapping issues and the production process should thus be organized in such a way as to promote both competence and autonomy.

The LOM program is an attempt to give practical effect to these ideas through cooperation between employers, employees and social researchers. Important characteristics of this program are:

1. The theoretical and methodological point of departure which is based on the notion of democratic dialogue. Based on communications theory and on the so-called linguistic turn in philosophy, it forms the vanguard of the LOM program. It expresses the notion that the quality of human thought and action is largely determined by the quality of the communication between people and punctuates a shift in focus away from design theory and more towards the process of developing the linguistic resource with which management and workers themselves can approach their problems. Democratic dialogue, involving large networks of people, determines the direction and nature of the local development.

2. The large-scale nature of the program. It comprises over 50 projects which have been developed with the help of social scientists.

3. The way in which the concept of democratic dialogue has been converted into action parameters:

- (a) The basic unit of change is not the single organization but

is formed by a cluster of four enterprises.

(b) An important element in the development process is the use of start-up conferences which are organized according to certain principles and which act as an introductory arena where people can have a first exposure to democratic dialogue.

(c) The development of broad-base and deep-slice projects that span the main levels and functional areas of the enterprise.

(d) Projects are part of a process of building broader networks in which local developments are linked with social and political structures at the macro level.

One of the principal results of the Swedish program, which is now embarking on its sixth year, is that it has proved capable of creating new structures and relationships in which employers, employees and social scientists collaborate with a view to democratizing work organizations.

I started my lecture by reminding you of the inherently negative features of bureaucratic organizations. The Holocaust has shown how these system characteristics can take on a diabolical significance. I then went on to tell you that since the 1970s there has been an organizational alternative which combines effectiveness with participatory democracy. I also pointed out, however, that the diffusion of this new organizational paradigm is proceeding very slowly despite its economic relevance and in spite of the fact that the values system on which it is based is fully consistent with that of our Western society. In fact, the experience to date suggests that there are no good technical, organizational or economic reasons why the new form of organization should not be evolved further. On the contrary, the development of adaptive and flexible organizations is rather a matter of urgency.

The question is, therefore, why do we have difficulty in accepting

this new form of work organization? Experience has shown that irrational attitudes can play an important role and that these are often insufficiently recognized. In addition, many approaches are based on inadequate assumptions about the functioning of organizations and the nature of the diffusion process. In the final analysis, our knowledge of organizations is still very limited. However, in view of the open-system properties of organizations we may conclude that a socio-ecological approach will be the most effective one. In this way the connections between the individual and the organizational and societal aspects of participative democracy can come to the fore and become purposefully built-in components in the development process.

The transition from the old to the new organization paradigm is a radical process which corresponds with a cultural "figure-ground reversal." The significance of the new design principles far transcends the world of business organization. It is a matter not only of organizational development but also of societal change. We should never forget that the Holocaust was characterized by the fact that it was based on connecting a totalitarian ideology with the old bureaucratic organization paradigm. It was not difficult for the Nazi regime to misuse the existing bureaucratic infrastructures for its own ends. Seen from the viewpoint of system characteristics, this did not cause any dissonance. The Eichmann trial once again illustrated very clearly the significance of the saying, "Befehl ist Befehl." Moreover, if one is oneself regarded as an object by the organization it is not so difficult to treat others as objects, too.

The old paradigm was, of course, not the cause of the Holocaust but it was certainly an essential prerequisite. An important question in this connection is what influence the new paradigm would have had on the Holocaust. It is very unlikely that an infrastructure based on the principles of participative democracy could have been used in the same way by the Nazis. It is even very doubtful whether an ideology such as National Socialism could have taken root in a social environment which functioned in accordance with the characteristics of the new paradigm. Its emphasis on democratic values

and its ability to give a specific organizational meaning to local autonomy, personal responsibility and development makes it a very important--albeit perhaps not fully efficacious--bulwark against both old and new forms of fascism.

Final Remarks

In summary, I would like to suggest that a socio-ecological approach will provide a new outlook for the democratization of organizations. It makes it possible to place irrational psychological factors and diffusion strategies in their mutual context. It seems reasonable to assume, therefore, that this strategy will help to greatly reduce a number of major problems connected with the development of participative democracy. Despite these expectations, I also believe that the question of why we have qualms about participative democracy is still left partly unanswered. There does not seem to be an adequate response to it. The question is probably too difficult, like the question about the "why" of the Holocaust. Perhaps the dimensions behind these questions cannot be comprehended in the present state of social scientific thinking. Perhaps--while continuing to pose the question--we should look for the answer on a different plane. Not in the causal texture of knowing, but in the ontology of action. In that connection--and to end on a hopeful note--I would like to suggest that the real significance of Milgram's experiments lies not in the fact that 70 percent of the subjects were obedient but in the fact that 30 percent were not prepared to follow instructions which they considered immoral.

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