

RWL 2009

Symposium abstracts

Human and Social Sustainability in Turbulent Work
Organizations

Individual development in organisations-a case study of a bank

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Adult developmental theories claim that people can develop during their lives towards more complex and differentiated ways of understanding themselves and the world. Such a development enables people to think and act in more independent and complex ways. The aim of this paper is to discuss the relevance of adult development in an organizational setting, where results from a study conducted in a Swedish commercial bank will be used as a base.

This paper is based on a study at Handelsbanken, which is a decentralized organisation where decisions are both allowed and supposed to be made at the local level. The fit between mental demands on employees in the bank and the internal capacity of the employees to meet these demands are at focus. The Washington University Sentence Completion Test has been used to determine developmental levels of employees at a few bank offices. The results show that many employees of the bank are at a specific level (the Expert level), and that there seems to be a fit between this developmental level and what are expected from employees in the bank today. Although, demands on employees are increasing and more independent and self-going employees are needed in the bank in order for it to be successful in the future. It is therefore of importance for the organization to promote further development of its employees.

Adult developmental theories can help us to understand more about how people can develop within the organizations and why people are or are not able to live up to what are expected from them. By using this knowledge we could create organizations that take individual factors into account in a better way than today and support individual learning and development within the organisational setting, and therefore make our modern organizations more sustainable in the long-run.

meaning at work - identity and learning in the elderly care

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Meaning in work is essential in creating good working conditions and at the same time a necessity for creating learning processes and perhaps even coherent organizational change. But how is meaning in work established? How is (creation of) meaning in work interrelated with organizational change? What are opportunities and barriers for developing meaning and learning at the workplace? These are some of the issues that we will address in this paper based on an ongoing study of meaning in work within the elderly care.

The issue of meaning in work has since Thorsrud and Emery played an important role in the discussion of how to create a good work and good work environment, pointing out e.g. autonomy in work and societal usefulness of the product as important characteristics of a meaningful work. Today the discussion of meaning in work is revitalized, but has changed its focus. As several authors point out identity at work is increasingly linked to its meaningfulness (e.g. Elgaard Jensen & Westenholz 2004). While the discussion of the meaningful work in the 70ies and 80ies concentrated on developing characteristics of a good and meaningful work, we would argue, that we need to understand meaning in work in a more dynamic way in order to grasp the role meaning play in creating a good work environment. Firstly, ascription of meaning should be seen as a process, where subjective enactment in a specific context plays an important role. (Weick 1995). Secondly, what really makes meaning an important in work environment is that meaning is constantly challenged by changes in work. Therefore it is necessary to focus on the processes where meaning in work is established and reproduced. Here, we find it fruitful to look at concepts of social learning where meaning is a result of learning but also a prerequisite for learning (e.g. Wenger 1998). With this approach creation of meaning in work becomes a learning process that is closely related to organizational change. In the paper we will present results from our study on meaning in work within the elderly care characterised by frequent changes. We discuss a concept of meaning in work, which focuses on processes of developing positive work identity, and which emphasizes possibilities for collective learning in communities of practise. Drawing on our case study from two Danish municipalities we will then consider how meaning is established in an interrelation between subjective and collective learning processes. We end up discussing possibilities and barriers for developing meaning and learning in this specific context and how this affects opportunities for organizational change.

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Need for autonomy and integration in different leadership styles

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The need in different leadership styles for co-worker's autonomy in thinking and in action, respectively integration in thinking and in action, will be discussed in this paper. The purpose is to find a way for organizations to follow nature's way to reach sustainability. Theoretically an organization with integrated autonomy for co-workers will be a complex adaptive system, and thus able to adapt to turbulent changes in the context. For co-workers to be at the same time both autonomous (deciding by their own) and integrated (controlled by the organization) seems to be contradictory. But complex systems are energized by the dynamics between such conflicting states, or dualities.

Different kinds of control are used in organizations to integrate the actions of the workers into the operation of the company. It is common to use categories like: direct control, bureaucratic control, technological control and normative control, and a mixture of these is normally used in companies. A high degree of normative control may be the best way to ensure the possibility of having both autonomy and integration at the same time. Normative control consists of socially constructed structures like a common vision, a company culture, an institutionalized praxis, a relational and a membership.

There are lots of publications dealing with styles of leadership giving some autonomy for workers, for example empowerment or self leadership. Studying the relation between the leader and the worker in a control perspective it is possible to construct a scale consisting of the following stages: Autocratic, Consultative, Participative, Consensus, Generative and Laissez-Fair. (The Generative leadership is described in another paper to this symposium.)

All leadership styles, except Laissez-Fair, are meant to ensure integration of the actions of the workers towards the goal of the organization. In all leadership styles, except the Autocratic, there is a belief that use of workers experiences and thinking may be of benefit for the organization, implying a need of autonomy in thought of the workers. Only in the Consensus and the Generative style of leadership the workers are given some control of decisions. Thus in those two styles there is a need of integration of the worker's thinking towards the goal of the organization, so that they are able and willing to participate in decisions favourable to the whole organization. Generative is the only leadership style where all four demands have to be fulfilled, both autonomy and integration in both thinking and acting of workers. Autonomy in action is demanded of workers since adaptation and innovation towards increased fitness is meant to start when the worker independently adjust his/her way to work in a new situation. Integrated autonomy is the most demanding leadership style, but it may also be a way towards decentralized resource generation and sustainability.

Organisation innovation grounded in empowerment and interaction

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This paper deals with innovative organising through illuminating organisational development grounded in empowerment and interaction. A company case is analysed from a managerial perspective with the aid of concepts from organisational pedagogics. The aim is to make the managerial endeavour comprehensible theoretically.

The case is taken from one of Ericsson's units within the telecom industry. This unit underwent a comprehensive process of organisational renewal. Three aspects of renewal are in focus, namely empowerment, small company approach and teamwork. Empowerment constituted an important underlying idea and motive force, the small company approach and teamwork were two fundamental organisational principles. The importance of interaction in this process of change is analysed using three concepts from organisational pedagogics as intellectual tools, namely competence, collective learning and relationality, the aim being to show how the prerequisites of interaction and learning were created through underlying values and through the way in which the operation was organised.

The analysis shows that a management's basic values can, if reflected and characterised by ideas of empowerment, be of decisive importance as a driving force of innovative organisational development. Keywords: competence, organisational pedagogics, relations, interaction.

Routine-generating and regenerative workplace learning

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The research focuses on workplace learning in industrial work. Everyday learning events building professional competence and contributing to organizational learning are studied in four case companies operating in the Finnish and Swedish package-supplier sectors. The research has a qualitative, interpretive approach. Interviews with employees and managers along with workplace observations have been carried out. The research distinguishes two types of learning processes: routine-generating learning contributing to basic job mastery and regenerative learning keeping employees' competence up-to-date and generating new work methods. Routine-generating learning processes taking place when an employee joins an organization are planned, supported, and assessed in the case companies. However, the lack of task and job rotation delimits further routine-generating learning. Regenerative learning takes place at the individual level but is not adequately supported at the collective level. The paper offers practical ideas on how to promote the two types of learning processes in industrial work.

Staying alive

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This paper is based on a research project called "Learnpartner". The work was organized as a joint research project between Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Spain, and Germany. Our project task was to describe best practice for partnership-based work on the labour market within the European steel and metal industry when responding to the process of restructuring. The research results presented in the paper discusses issues such as why does restructuring lead to developing different outcomes at organisational and at individual level and what factors determines if restructuring can result in developing sustainable conditions?

The paper describes empirical findings regarding the consequences of change processes taking place at organisational and at individual level. The research design entailed using qualitative methods such as work shadowing and interviews with trade union people, employees, managers, human resource personnel, researchers. The data collection was based on case studies conducted at two companies supplemented by interactive methods during discussions, workshops, and seminars, which meant involving practitioners from both the companies and the trade unions in interpreting the results (Aagaard Nielsen & Svensson 2006). Many people have taken part in interpreting and analysing the research findings as a method of validating and discussing the research results, and to learn from experience. The theoretical framework relates to work organisations, work environment, employee participation, industrial relations (Huzzard 2004), competence development as well as conditions for sustainable development (Hvid & Lund 2002). In order to describe the research findings, a model was used to highlight different factors that can influence change processes.

The results show that both the companies have been successful when it comes to responding to the restructuring process; however, there are some differences at individual level. Some workers experience deteriorating working conditions resulting in work intensification (Docherty et al. 2002) and an increase in work related stress (Karasek & Theorell 1990) as other workers experience a boost in their working conditions as well as increased opportunities for personal development and organisational development (Shapiro 2001). I will on the basis of the different outcomes discuss how different factors mediate to create barriers and precondition in the change process. Important factors are; management strategies, trade union involvement, workteams, employee participation, work conditions and work environment, as they act to influence the entire process and influence the outcomes of restructuring work, and ultimately create conditions for sustainable development. When employees have the option to participate in planning the restructuring process, the process is more likely to lead to sustainable conditions (Hvid 2006).

Sustainable work in networking public organizations

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Research for sustainable work systems (SWS) maintains that besides supporting organizational capability, work should also enhance and regenerate individual and collective resources. Alasoini (2003) argues for many-sidedness in work systems research aiming at systemic integration of individual, organisation and societal levels. Also, the concept of sustainability presumes a dynamic, temporal analysis of work systems (Alasoini 2003).

Kira and Frieling (2007), in studying individual and collective learning in industrial work, expand the socio-technical systems thinking by including internal, awareness-related resources to the analysis. They define sustainable working-life development as stemming from simultaneous growth in complexity of awareness and complexity of actions, both in employees and organizations. While it is based on chaordic systems thinking, we call it CST approach.

Developmental work research (DWR), based on cultural-historical activity theory, has its starting point in collective learning within work activities (Engeström 1987). It has been utilised in analyzing and promoting employees' work-related well-being in changing work (eg, Mäkitalo 2005).

In our paper, the first aim is to illustrate the DWR approach with two empirical analyses from the Finnish public sector, namely the changing work of vocational teachers and family therapists. Like business companies, also these public organizations are continuously striving for more functional and cost-efficient service concepts. For employees this means that besides carrying out one's own individual tasks, one must simultaneously participate and take responsibility in a network of collaborators. This has challenged the employees' personal sense at work as their work includes more and more activities that they take as extra or exceptional work.

The second aim of the paper is to discuss the DWR and the CST approaches as alternative perspectives towards sustainable work systems. In particular, we address the way "regenerative resources" are understood in the DWR and CST approaches. We will hypothesise that while both approaches share the idea of enhancing employees' opportunities for collective learning, DWR has potential for SWS in integrating dynamic historicity, and in connecting the individual and societal levels of activity into understanding changes at work.

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Tasks in the generative leadership; creating conditions for autonomy and integration

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In new lines of business where the competence of knowledgeable employees is a driving force and precondition, new forms of leadership and management roles have to develop. In many workplaces the employees are required to autonomously and together with colleagues and partners make decisions, take responsibility and interact in multiple directions. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the demands that are put upon managers and leaders in order to support autonomy and integration among the members of the organization.

This paper is part of a conceptual framework of an ongoing research project focusing leadership. The starting point for the project is that increased competence in workgroups can be created if the foreman creates opportunities for communication and cooperation at the workplace. It is a conceptual paper which, from a perspective of complexity theory, deals with a new type of leadership: the Generative leadership.

When studying leadership from a complexity perspective, the unit of analysis is the workgroup. Generative leadership can be described as supporting and facilitating self-organization; a process where autonomous and integrated members in a workgroup act in concert through coordination. The workgroup members are more or less autonomous depending on their competence and on to what degree the organization allows or suppresses the freedom to act. Three socially produced structures of interaction integrate the members in a workgroup and supports self-organization: group culture, group praxis and group relations. As a result, learning and creativity can emerge through the dynamic, interactive processes which are taking place in the workgroup.

Generative leadership gives co-workers possibilities and capabilities to develop qualities as: a high level of autonomy and integration, and a well developed interactive competence. We argue that important tasks of the generative leadership are: to manage political tasks; to have an openness to change one's preconceptions; to have a serving attitude; to have a general view; to draw upon behavioral knowledge; and to organize for: the building of competent relations; communication possibilities; the transcending of borders, and the development of integrated autonomy.

By utilizing the opportunities for learning and increased competence at group level through generative leadership, organizations can meet with several preconditions for competitiveness and sustainability, such as learning, flexibility and creativity. The generative leadership is part of the new knowledge economy and in line with the high road strategy and is not much studied before.

The Meaning of Work and the Importance of Ethical Formulation Competency for a Sustainable work Environment

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The Meaning of Work and the Importance of Ethical Formulation Competency for a Sustainable work Environment

With regard to corporate social responsibility and sustainability in the work environment I will argue that what is important is the capacity of ethical formulation competency – that is the ability of conceiving ethical problems in the work environment. We can mention different forms of stress behaviour, based on the feeling of inferiority and lack of dignity or lack of recognition as equal of employees, for example in relation to disease, age, work, rationalizations and restructuring in the firm. It also concerns how to deal with ethical problems of change, organizational development and multicultural relations in the firm. Accordingly, in the daily work environment of the firm a problem is the ability of the manager, but also of all employees, to focus on the deeper ethical meaning of their relations and to develop the capacity of moral learning, thought and judgment.

We can call this need of judgment the need for “ethical formulation competency”, which consists of the identification, analysis, reflection and understanding of ethical problems at work. By putting ethical dilemmas into words and formulating notions about the ethical it is possible to create an operational framework for a better work-life-balance.

With ethical formulation competency a manager or an employee will be able to 1) identify ethical problems 2) find and justify ethical aspects of their decision-making 3) use ethics in their daily work. Such a capacity of ethical formulation can be conceived in 1) work with implementation of (cultural) values 2) capacity to understand ethical dimensions of daily work and management 3) ability to increase individual and organizational learning of managing different organizational processes 4) capacity to work with a broader legitimacy and justification of decisions.

Ethics at the workplace also concerns employee rights and management duties towards the corporation as the organizer of work and production of the corporation. Indeed, work is characterized by many paradoxes. Today people nearly spend more time of their adult life at work than on free time or with their families. Work is basic to the structure of the self and there is a close connection between work and personal identity. We may put it bluntly: you are what you do at work.

Accordingly, in this paper, I want to propose the idea of ethical formulation competency as fundamental for a sustainable work-life balance and for ensuring increased learning in the work environment of modern organizations.

The temporal order in boundaryless work

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In the 'TIGA project' we aim to develop concept of the 'temporal order' in boundaryless work (Alvin 2008) . A concept, that can catch time related conditions as intensity, flow, unpredictability, and rhythms of work. The aim is to create knowledge and concepts, which can support a kind of regulation of time in boundaryless work.

In modern boundaryless work time is set by tasks, deadlines and individual ordering of time rather than sold working hours, and all time becomes possible working time. Boundaries in time and space are broken down. Krings et al. (2008 p. 13) summarise these trends as follows: 'Time has become punctiform, instantaneous, fragmented, non-sequential; it is often non-measurable, less accountable in new terms and bounds of the working day. And these changes are indeed central in the current phase of transition in modern societies'.

The thesis of the project is, that the order of time in boundaryless work can be unsustainable in its character because it can create high strain, limit possibilities of regeneration, and restrict possibilities for learning. The thesis is also, that it is possible to create an order of time in boundaryless work marked by 'sustainable rhythms', that allows regeneration and learning among the employees.

Six companies will be associated to the project. All are companies in sectors, where the 'temporal order' has been predictable and strictly organised, but where a new much more chaotic time environment is emerging: Two primary schools, where both teachers and pupils are working in different and temporal teams. Two industrial companies where the time structure of the work is directly affected by demands on the global market. Two conference centres with a complex and ever changing time structure.

The companies included are all interested in changing their 'temporal order'. In each company the psychosocial working environment is mapped by a survey. Interviews, observations and workshops will be arranged in each company as a part of the mapping of the 'temporal order'. Our mapping of the 'temporal order' will be presented for the company, and an action plan will be formed to improve the environment. After one year the actions will be evaluated.

In the paper we will:

- a. Characterise the order of time in boundaryless work, based on a literature study.
- b. Illustrate the theoretical points with our own first case studies
- c. Suggest a concept of 'sustainable rhythms' as a perspective of development of the order of time in modern work settings

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