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Shaping Communities of Work, an Organisational Development Approach

Michiel Schoemaker

In order to survive in a turbulent environment many organisations have to operate as an open system. This open system often has the configuration of a network. This networked organisation acts as a community of work. This community of work is based upon a specific organisational identity. The central question addressed by this article is: How can organisation development function in the process of developing communities of work and what is the role of the change agent?

The rise of new organisational forms is described. The importance of the concept of communities of work and organisational identity is shown. Thereupon the insights from 25 cases in shaping communities of work from a perspective of organisational development are presented. Special attention is paid to the role of the change agent.

Key words: Communities of work, organisational identity, change, organisational development, change agent

Introduction

In order to survive in a turbulent environment, many organisations have to operate as open systems. Within open systems, cooperative action is based on the willingness of human beings to contribute and develop their talents as members of communities of work. Consequently, the proper functioning of organisations becomes dependent on shared values and organisational identity between networks of people. This implies that the modern organisation

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has to act as a flexible network, where production in space and time is often fragmented and displaced (Castells 2000; Schoemaker 2003a). As a result, we have experienced the rise of the networked organisation over the past ten years. The networked organisation acts as a "community of work", but how does this kind of networked organisation evolve? This article presents an action research approach to organisational development. An action research approach can help an organisation to transform from a closed, bureaucratic system to a networked community of work, without deteriorating into an anarchistic opportunity coalition. Besides insights into the concepts of the network organisation, the article presents case evidence of organisations "in transformation". Concepts, tools and instruments of action research are presented.

Dilemmas of organisational development, the change agents have to balance between science and good practice, are discussed. The central question addressed by this article is: *How can organisational development function in the process of developing communities of work, and what is the role of the change agent?*

The first section describes the rise of new organisational forms. The second section deals with the importance of the concept of communities of work within these new organisational forms. Section 3 goes into the details of organisational development and the insights from 25 cases in shaping communities of work. Section 4 describes the role of the change agent. How can the change agent deal with dilemmas? The paper concludes with some conclusions and a discussion.

1. Developments in organisations

The roots of today's organisation can be found in the industrial age. The industrial organisation was above all a rational-functional construct. To serve the purposes of mass production, structures and processes were designed and functions created, all based on rational-functional assumptions. Focusing purely on efficient and effective production, every human emotion was eradicated, individuals themselves being of no importance. Of course organisations were at the same time "communities" of workers, but these were not

relevant as entities for the smooth operation of the organisation itself. For employers, the organisation and the community of workers were considered to be two separate worlds. Employers devoted attention to the community of workers because their well-being was a necessary condition for optimal performance in the actual work processes. Since individuals could be easily replaced in those processes, feelings between people could be "rationalised away". Taken as a whole, this led to a firm conviction regarding the manipulability of the organisation. Designing and organising rational and functional work processes was the core, the community of workers an independent entity at a distance.

Since the mid-eighties of the last century, work in organisations has been subject to a profound transformation. Today the majority of the working population in so-called "developed countries" works in service-oriented organisations using information and communication technology (ICT) on a regular basis. Computers, e-mail, mobile phones, intranet and Internet are a firmly embedded part of the working environment. At the same time, dependency on employees' talents, and the social capital they bring with them, has gained tremendous importance. The creation of added value in organisations is based upon those talents. As a consequence, the organisational model of the industrial bureaucracy is in retreat. Organisation in contemporary society is based upon a mix of human talents, social capital and ICT. These talents and this social capital and ICT are intertwined in organisational processes that are steered and managed in new ways (often by means of internal market structures). Services can be provided to large groups of customers based on this. Many authors have argued at length that the organisational design of the present information society is the network (Castells 2000a, 2000b; Brenters 1999; Schoemaker 1998; Nohria/Ghosal 1997; Hastings 1993). A concise overview of the essence of the network will suffice here, followed by the introduction of a distinction between the organisation as: (a) a way to organise in order to produce products and services (first order networks); and (b) a social bond between people (second order networks).

The latter leads to the introduction of the concept of community of work. Furthermore, the former will show (tangible) properties of design while the

latter will reveal some (intangible) properties of social capital (Collins/Porras 2000; Schoemaker/Jonker 2005)

Providing services has become the driving force of Western economies. In countries like Canada, Sweden and the Netherlands, roughly 80% of the working population is engaged in one kind of service production or another. Within the service industry, a new concept has been emerging over the past 15 years that can be labelled "virtual services": the "product" has become intangible. Providing services has become more and more about creating an experience, managing someone else's emotions. Many examples of this profound change can be found in banking/insurance, the tourism industry, the media, the entertainment sector and, not to be forgotten, the Internet sector. Many people have found jobs in those sectors, where they no longer "produce" something tangible, but only virtual and intangible services. The nature of work in the service industry is often triggered by clients and their demands and is therefore dynamic in nature. This is due to the fact that clients' expectations and demands change, while acting upon a short service-provision cycle. This accounts especially for "instant" services provided in a virtual environment. A more striking contrast with the long cyclical labour within industrial organisations, where clients are often anonymous, is hardly imaginable. Furthermore, looking nowadays at classic production organisations, with products such as copiers, consumer electronics or cellular phones, they are building their organisations more and more around core functions such as R&D, marketing and logistics, which are all service-related activities. Much of the physical production of goods is outsourced to low-wage countries around the globe.

The organisational network design was created in the mid-eighties as a result of the breakthrough of ICT technology. From that period onwards, due to the growing use of PCs, e-mail, mobile phones, Internet and intranet, the way to organise changed fundamentally. ICT has made new network-building necessary to do the work. In service-provision processes, certainly when this is done by teams, the service is created in the networks. Good examples are consultancy firms, media companies and insurance companies. These companies are organisations of professionals using (internal and external) networks to carry out assignments. Other examples are call centres, a good ex-

ample of standardised mass services, where people provide services to clients on the basis of ICT networks. It is a fact that in the service industry networks have become the leading organisational design. Work for particular clients can be non-synchronised in terms of time, space or geography. Call centres for European Airliners, for example, can be found in India, and R&D Divisions of multi-nationals can operate 24 hours a day. The rise of ICT has also led to more self-regulation on the job. Thinking and acting are combined at work. Individuals have the freedom to make their own decisions and to regulate their work processes accordingly. Compared to classic industrial organisations, individuals can manage their own work activities to a much higher degree. During the last decades of the twentieth century, the suggestion was often put forward that the classic hierarchical organisation was bound to disappear completely and be replaced by the network organisation. At present, the organisational landscape contains organisations in which functional and network designs can be found, either combined or parallel to each other.

This leads to hybrid organisations having to deal with built-in structural dilemmas (Schoemaker 1998). It is becoming clear that the dualities and dilemmas the "modern" organisation creates are going to be an undeniable part of modern management.

2. Communities of work

Organising requires a second-order form of networks. So far networks have been discussed here as organisational "structures" enabling the production of goods or services. Line structures have transformed into network structures. These could be called first-order networks. At the same time the social network between people is becoming more important. This is what Baker calls second-order networks (Baker 2000). The growing interest in second-order networks can be seen in the ongoing debate about social capital. "Social capital consists of the stock of active connections among people: the trust, mutual understanding, and shared values and behaviours that bind the members of human networks and communities and make cooperative action possible." (Cohen/Prusak 2001: 4). The idea of social capital emphasises the relations between people and the network, between employees and clients, in order for

an organisation to function successfully. A central assumption is the existence and maintenance of a "network" of relations between an individual and his or her social environment. These relations are of fundamental importance to making a service organisation work. The durability of these relations is based upon trust, mutual understanding and shared norms and values that lead to acts and activities that connect people (McEwan 2001). The nature and content of these second-order networks are extremely valuable for each and every individual to carry out his or her job and thus for the organisation as a whole. Social capital is created and maintained by investing talents in networks and work. This can only happen when there is a sufficient level of mutual trust and understanding and when there are shared norms and values (Handy 1995; Hatch/Schultz 2004). It has become abundantly clear that talents and social capital provide the basis for connecting people in various networks and that they deserve special attention in the modern organisation. This leads on to an important concept in modern organising: the community of work.

Every person has a "sense of belonging" (Weick 1995). People fundamentally want to belong to something and be member of a "community". Social identity theory (Tajfel 1981, 1982; Turner 1987; Hogg 1996) elaborates how individuals position themselves in society: through a process of self-orientation and self-categorising, choosing a community or various communities they consider themselves to belong to. A community can be a sports club, a political party, an association, a church and, of course, a company. Individuals are therefore simultaneously members of various communities. The modern network organisation also tends to become such a community: a community of work. Looking at organisations through this "ideal-type" perspective, individuals perceive membership of an organisation as a way to develop their personal identity. To work in an organisation offers ample opportunities to invest and develop one's talents, leading to the creation of self-esteem reinforcing one's personality. The basic condition is that people are willing to do so. To invest and develop one's talents is intentional, leading to the deployment of activities in the local community. Membership and talent development does not come about by chance nor can it be forced upon people from outside.

It is only the individual person acting intentionally, choosing and contributing his or her talents to the diverse communities chosen. There is of course also a downside in this picture: organisations don't always offer attractive work, many people are "forced" to work, communities do have in- and out-groups, the work in networked organisations also produces a lot of stress and burn out. But one could state that the network organisation thrives on the will of the individual members. The community of work becomes a domain where emotions, human relations, group dynamics, sense-making and many other non-rational issues are becoming dominant. This is even more striking when it is compared to the classic industrial organisation, with its functional rationality, manipulability and tangibility.

The fact that individuals shape the community of work has two important implications for modern organisations. First there is a growing inter-affiliation and interdependency of work processes and the community of work. Second, assumptions regarding the manipulability, and thus manageability, of "organisations" are under pressure. To illustrate the importance and impact of these two implications it is appropriate to review the industrial organisation briefly with the benefit of hindsight.

The industrial organisation was above all a rational-functional construct rooted in Enlightenment thinking. To serve the purposes of mass production, structures and processes were designed and functions created, all based upon rational-functional assumptions. Focusing purely on efficient and effective production required that every human emotion was eradicated, individuals themselves being of no importance. Of course organisations were at the same time communities of workers but these were not relevant to the smooth operation of the organisation itself. For employers the organisation and the community of workers were considered to be two separate worlds. This doesn't imply that there was no such thing as an informal organisation and the workers didn't feel themselves part of a community, but managers didn't "use" this informal organisation to improve the work. Employers only devoted attention to the community of workers because their well-being was a necessary condition for optimal performance in the actual work processes. Since individuals could be easily replaced in those processes, feelings between people could be "rationalised away". Taken as a whole this led to a

firm conviction regarding the manipulability of the organisation. Designing and organising rational and functional work processes was the core, the community of workers an independent entity at a distance.

How is this different from the organisation in the information society? With the emerging importance of talents and social capital, the need for flexibility, and growing self-management through ICT, all of a sudden the individual becomes the prominent actor at the core of the organisation. As a result, the community of work emerges as an important factor for organisational processes, and communities of work and organisational processes become strongly interwoven (as indicated by the definition of social capital introduced earlier). This implies that the informal organisation, the community employees are part of, becomes an important part of the organisational processes. The community and organisational processes become intertwined. It is abundantly clear that processes are necessary in order to produce goods and services. This implies well-thought-out (not necessarily rational) labour, or work, designs. The interplay between employees and customers and employees' demands creates the need to be organised in the strict meaning of the term.

At the same time, the interlockedness of the community of work, the sustainability of social capital and the intention of individuals to use their talents become prerequisites for the smooth operation of organisational processes. It is evident that those matters can only be influenced in part since emotions, human relations and sense-making, together with other non-rational processes, play an important part.

With the rise of the modern organisation in the information society, the community of work has become a fundamental part of organising. The intentional use and development of talents, sustainability of social capital and the creation of networks are crucial elements of successful organisations. But do organisations pay enough attention to these communities of work, or is organisational change still seen as a process of restructuring and redesigning systems?

The behaviour of individuals is anchored in specific values and norms (Sarup 1996). Becoming a member of a group depends on the congruence of values and norms on an individual and a group level (Gioia 1998). The

stronger this congruence, the stronger the group will behave according to this specific and clear set of values and norms. These values and norms also constitute the group's identity. Organisational identity leads to rhetorical questions such as: who are we anyway as a group, as a department, as an organisation? What do we stand for? Organisational identity is (a) what is taken by organisational members as central to the organisation, (b) what makes the organisation distinctive from other organisations and (c) what is perceived by members to be an enduring or continuing feature linking the present organisation with the past (and presumably the future) (Albert/Whetten 1985, 264). A clear organisational identity gives a group a past, present and future and shapes the borders of the group. It is this identity that creates a specific community of work (Schoemaker 2003a). Communities of work tend to behave as flexible networks of people, where the organisational identity provides the 'glue'. Individuals are socialised, and identify with these communities of work. People belonging to a community of work permanently face a complex balancing act across three dimensions: (1) between rights and duties, (2) between what is demanded internally and externally and (3) between personal and collective needs and expectations. This balancing act is essential in the process of socialising and recognition and therefore a key in shaping a community of work with a specific identity. It is assumed that in the end the organisational identity, based upon embedded values and norms, determines what happens in a community of work (Schoemaker 2003a).

3. Shaping communities

The rest of this paper is devoted to the process of organisational development of communities of work. As stated in the previous section, communities of work are extremely important for the modern network organisation to function properly. We will now examine HOW these communities of work can be developed and WHAT role action research can play in this process.

There are two key issues to the development of communities of work: (1) how and how far individuals identify with and commit themselves to the group and the organisation in which they work; and (2) how social capital operates in that group/organisation (Wenger 1998; Pennington 2002). "How"

refers to an action perspective. It concerns how individuals form groups, how groups get social capital to operate. This means that the core change principle is that the actors involved design the change themselves (Guzzo/Dickson 1996; Bohm 1996). Because the actors design the change themselves, it will not always proceed in a linear fashion. The change process is an uncertain route and can be fuzzy (de Laat/Simons 2003). The change agent (see also next section) has a helping role and can assist managers and employees who are in the middle of the change process, by contributing relevant ideas, information and insights. The change agent stands with one foot in the change process and one foot outside. This is the key principle of action research. The role of action research is to facilitate organisational change in the direction in which the actors concerned wish to go (Greenwood/Levin 1998; Vennix 1996). The essential requirements for designing communities of work (commitment and social capital) and HOW action research can help to strengthen these processes are explained below.

The findings are based upon 25 cases the author has done as researcher and consultant in Dutch organisations over the period of 1995 – 2005. All organisations involved had more than 500 employees (up to 6000 employees). All the organisations were in a period of transformation, trying to cope with turbulence in the environment, changing demands from their stakeholders or major internal restructuring mainly due to new ICT developments (as described in section 1). The author had the role of consultant for the management team or board, but his explicit assignment was to follow a participative approach, whereby paying special attention to developing communities of work. In all the cases culture and organisational identity were core issues in the change process. In many of the cases identification and identification processes of members of the organisation were also core issues. Particular attention was paid to matters such as the conditions under which identification occurs and the level of the organisation with which employees identify. Despite differences in the findings both between and within the cases studied, the following general findings emerged from the research as a constant thread. All the cases can be typified as organisational development. It were long term change processes, were participative design, experiments, learning, reflection and evaluation were key issues in the change process. The author

used these cases for his research at the university. By means of interviews with actors (reflection and evaluation), logs, joint appraisals and surveys the organisational development was "followed" in time.

In most of the cases (23) it became apparent that a clear organisational identity is crucial in developing communities. In the discussions (group and individual) with employees it became clear that, as workers, they have a sense of belonging. They look for an 'anchor point'. Organisational identity is for many employees this anchor point, especially in organisations in transition. The more explicit the identity of the organisation, the more employees recognized this identity and the easier it was for them to identify with the organisation and its objectives and core competences. In analyzing all the results of the evaluation of the organisational development processes we came to the following findings in the field of organisational identity. (1) Identity is a socially constructed phenomenon which comes about in an interaction process between people. The qualitative case studies confirmed the picture that had emerged from the theoretical analysis in this respect. The majority of interviewees reported that in their experience organisational identity was a dynamic phenomenon. It was not static, and it changed over time. Reputation (outside world) and culture (internal world) were, in the view of the large majority of the interviewees, what determined this dynamic. (2) Groups strive to achieve a certain level of convergence around organisational identity. When groups are forming, a process of convergence occurs in the group leading to the emergence of a specific organisational identity. The level at which this identity emerges, and/or the level at which employees identify themselves with it differs markedly from one organisation to another. No clear unequivocal picture emerged from the case studies. In two organisations this occurred at departmental, case or business-unit level. In one organisation, differences within the organisation were found: one group of employees saw identity at the level of the entire organisation, the other group saw it at departmental level. (3) The identity of the organisation was literally discovered through exchanging views about their own organisation, ascribing meaning to the individual and collaborative work in the organisation, shared behaviour, communication with clients and by making norms and values. Making this exchange process explicit through, for instance, socialization, rites, leadership

and organisation-development programmes the employees' identifycation with the organisational identity is strengthened.

Further analysing our data, we came to a number of insights regarding the development of communities of work.

(1) In all the organisations identifying values and making these values explicit to all the members of the community is a process of open space in search. It starts off with 'fuzzy' notions, often by means of telling corporate stories, creating local (team or department level) team building or using informal meetings to look for shared values among members. After a certain period it reaches a stage where a clear insight is developed and these insights are used to specify organisational identity. (2) The basis for collective action in communities of work is trust and a set of collective norms. They offer identification for the individuals within the community of work, with the work itself and the organisation. This identification is a prerequisite for the motivation of individuals. In table 1 the main results of this part of the evaluation is presented.

Table 1: Critical success factors shaping organisational identity
(Source: Schoemaker 2003b)

Shaping identity:
• individuals are involved in drawing up the mission, aims and strategy of the organisation
• there are shared norms and values in the organisation
• the ambitions of the group/network are known, shared and supported
• internal communication is open and there is mutual trust
• the management style is geared to:
○ confidence-building (transparency, openness, justice)
○ promoting internal communication
○ shared ambitions
○ shared norms and values
○ collective identity
• management leads employees (vision) and coaches them (shared responsibility)
• there is a culture of learning, it is a learning organisation

(3) Leadership is a very important issue. In most of the cases (21) we saw (groups) of managers or other internal stakeholders "clustering" around the subject of shaping communities and pushing it forward within the organisation. These internal stakeholders were convinced that developing communities of work was important in order to function successfully as an organisation. They were convinced that the effectiveness and efficiency of organisational processes were increased due to the "tightness" of the communities of work. Defining the shared organisational identity and leadership (not only at the top but also dispersed in the organisation) helped organisations over the threshold in organisational change processes from the stage of trial and error to the stage of "embedded" change. (4) Talent development is critical in bringing communities to a mature state. Talent is a degree of genius, of qualification, of preparedness. It is a capability embedded in the hearts and minds of people and expressed in day-to-day behaviour. Awareness of their own talents, using these talents in their work appeared to be crucial for individuals not only to be motivated in their work but also to fulfil the sense of belonging. "Committed" individuals are therefore very important when shaping communities of work. When talent development is 'managed' on the basis of distinct organisational values and focused on individual behaviour, it can be used effectively to embed new values in the organisation.

After evaluation of all the 25 cases of organisational development we came to the conclusion that explicit values, trust and a set of collective norms combined with leadership and talent development formed the ingredients for shaping communities of work. In different patterns, but over and over again, these issues were for many organisations the critical success factors in shaping communities of work.

After having looked at the findings of shaping communities of work in 25 organisations, it is time now to look at the role of the change agent in these processes. What is the role of the change agent, when he/she is a researcher and consultant? And how can this change agent deal with insights from different cases in order to create knowledge about organisational development in communities of work?

4. The role of the change agent

Essentially, three roles for change agents can be distinguished: (1) consultant; the role of the consultant on matters of content and process support, being a sounding board, and being a coach to managers and/or project groups; (2) executor, the role in which the change agent carries out activities him/herself; (3) broker, the role in which the change agent acts as an intermediary for services provided by third parties (for instance, hiring an education or training agency to run a course). In all these roles the change agent can be a researcher to, combining the stated roles with research (in order to create knowledge). In this section we want to focus on the role of the change agent as a consultant. We return to the 25 cases described in the former section. And look at the role of the change agents. These change agents were several types of people. It were not only internal project managers, members of teams but also external consultants (one of them the author of this article). We have asked all these change agents to analyse their organisational development processes and reflect on them from a research perspective. These findings were brought together and framed in the description given hereafter.

The organisations that were the clients of the change agents in the 25 cases were demanding. Change agents had to focus constantly on "giving added value" in their working practices and in terms of quality. The requirements for change agents' working practices that are most mentioned are: (1) to work with an open approach to the client, participative development, working out things together; (2) less instrumental thinking (no blueprints or roadmaps), more working to develop not only the organisation but also or even mostly the employees; (3) proven communication-abilities and forward-looking thinking and action; and finally (4) a result-oriented approach, by means of project work and follow up agreements.

In the reflection upon the 25 organisational development cases we encountered some problems, questions and potential role conflicts of the change agent. We found out that the questions were threefold. That had to do with the idea that to be able to act effectively in the development of a community of work, a change agent has to want to do this (he/she has

to have the motivation/ professional outlook), has to be able to do this (he/she has to have the necessary talents), and has a duty to do this (based on the perception of his/her role in the organisation/standard). This motivation, ability and obligation were the questions we encountered. These will now be examined in turn.

The first question many change agents encountered was *"Do I want to? What is the mentality and attitude of the actors concerned?"* The change agents made a thorough assessment of the community of work and decided whether he/she wanted to get involved. Questions that arose were the following: Is the mentality of the actors concerned aimed at tiding things over, overcoming problems or is it not constructive? Do the actors see the change agent as a suitable person to help? It is questions like these that force the change agent to adopt a position and weigh up whether he/she wants to play a role in the situation. This is a difficult decision to make, because in a time when customer-oriented and result-driven work reigns supreme, the agent would not want to appear to be unhelpful toward the client or even obstructive. Nevertheless, there is a real decision to be made because ultimately not wanting to intervene could in some circumstances be for the best, both for the development of the community of work and for the prestige/performance of the change agent him/herself.

All this means that the change agent has to constantly consider how to position him/herself with respect to a community of work, on a continuum from wholehearted commitment to not wanting to be involved at all. This means that a focused exploration of the problem, intake and diagnose at the beginning of the process is vitally important for a clear interpretation of the role. If the "do I want to?" question is answered in the affirmative, the next question concerns positioning. Is the agent to be an intermediary, process supervisor, coach or sounding board?

The second question that arose was*" Can I? What competences do I have to have as a change agent?"* The question being addressed here is whether the change agent could play a role in the development of the community of work. This question was directly linked to the competences that are needed to be able to operate effectively as a change agent. Our research in the 25 cases indicates that the following competences are relevant: problem analysis, re-

sult-driven attitude, organisational awareness, initiative, coaching ability, listening skills, powers of persuasion, reliability, integrity, ability to tolerate stress and communication skills. The combination of these competences (in various forms) enabled the change agents to research the situation, intervene and/or coach those involved.

The final question that arose was *"Should I? Is there a sense of urgency coming from the community of work to help and support?"* In all the cases it was important for change agents to decide what they should do with regard to the development of a community of work. Two issues were important here. First, the issue of relevance. In deciding whether they should play a role or not, the change agents constantly asked themselves whether the development of the community of work would have any effect on the continuity of the activities of the organisation. In the context of the role outlined above, the change agent often raised the question "Should I get involved in this process?" After all, processes of this nature are often complex, highly dynamic and unpredictable, and so they demand a great deal of time and energy. That brings us to the second issue: time and energy. Development processes can be "black holes" sucking in a huge amount of time and energy. For all the change agents it was necessary to constantly weigh up whether it is worthwhile investing all this time and energy into the development (will the returns justify the effort?), or would it be better to leave it to specialists, interim managers or other experts? This is a difficult question, of course, because it is often impossible to judge in advance.

In the organisational development of communities of work, the role of the change agent is often a crucial one. It becomes clear, from our cases, that the change agent is often faced with questions concerning his/her motivation, ability and obligation. Seen from this perspective, the change agent is just one of the actors in the communities. As soon as analysis and reflection for the sake of knowledge building get in, the picture becomes more complicated. When the change agent combines consultancy and research as described above, the issue of the scientist-practitioner comes up. In the role of the scientist, the change agent is doing research, developing new concepts and linking research findings to theories and

theoretical insights. In the role of practitioner, the change agent is someone who gives new meanings to things, advises and coaches. The scientist will pay a lot of attention to develop a thorough method or to use tested instruments. The practitioner will focus on ways of intervening and giving feedback to actors in the client system (Hope/Sutcliffe 1998; Hosmand/Polkinghorne 1992). If we want to learn from organisational development processes like these in communities of work change agents have to face and work with this dilemma.

5. Discussion

Many organisations are in the process of change, in which they are trying to make their structures and systems more flexible, to allow them to operate more like network organisations. This also involves paying attention to forms of communities of work (Schoemaker 2003a). All the same these changes cannot be taken for granted and a number of problems frequently arise (Argyris/Schön 1996; Weick 1995). When we look back at our 25 cases analysing the organisational development processes we can come to the following conclusions:

1) The changes are often combined with rationalisations: there is too much emphasis on structures and systems and too little emphasis on people and cooperation between people. As a result, the changes introduced can alienate employees.

2) Organisations turn out to be tenacious systems, with their own dynamics and defence mechanisms, which surpass the sum of the individuals. In other words, it takes a huge effort to change organisations fundamentally and it is often impossible.

3) Change often focuses too much on deficiencies and too little on what the organisation has (strengths, capacities, dreams).

4) Change agents often try to impose a new reality, without taking a proper look at the real, authentic movement.

5) Changes are seldom completed because managers are only rewarded for the energy they invest at the beginning and not for seeing the process right through.

In order to face problems like these, many organisations have come to the view that planned change does not work and that change has to be far more a process of development (French/Bell 1999, Bridges 2000). Many successful change processes are increasingly taking on the character of organisational development. This means that managers, employees and change agents no longer design organisational change around a blueprint. The limits to the manipulability of the organisation are accepted and change is increasingly seen as a journey of discovery and a process with uncertain outcomes. This kind of change has specific principles. In our research we found that many organisations that are successful in developing communities of work conceive the change process as follows:

1) Change is seen as a learning process. It is a process that involves many educative elements, that is to say aspects of learning and development of individuals and groups are built into the process.

2) Change is linked to problems and issues of the members of the organisation itself. Internal stakeholders are at least as important as external stakeholders, if not more so. The starting point for change lies in their interests.

3) Building on and utilising the experience of employees and managers is the key to the change process. The change in behaviour is underpinned by and based on employees' experience.

4) The change process is based on close cooperation between change agents and other actors. Cooperation between the employees/managers who have to work in the "new" organisation and the change agents (from within or outside the organisation) who only have a temporary role in the process is crucial.

5) Change is based on a number of fundamental values: democracy, humanity, authenticity, openness and natural and free expression of opinions and feelings are at the heart of the change process. Acting on the basis of these values is what makes change a success.

The role of change agents in all these change processes was a complex one. They struggled with various questions (motivation, ability and obligation) as well as with role ambiguity. To overcome these questions and role ambiguities we found out that the change agents had to be clear on several actions. First, good diagnosis of the problem and intake are essential. The change agent has to assess the complexity, dynamics and degree of unpredictability in the change process in order to judge whether he/she could play a relevant role. At this point the dilemma of objective judgment and subjective observation looms up. The change agent has to decide whether he/she wants to, can, and should fulfil a role. Here his/her personal view may be at odds with the wishes and requirements of the client, creating a conflict between a client-oriented approach and the agent's own professional opinions. Finally, the action perspective is important. Once a role has been chosen, it is difficult to change (without lengthy communication, modelling etc.). Role ambiguity is an even trickier problem: whose interests am I serving as change agent, and with all the complexity, dynamics and unpredictability involved, how do I make sure that I remain reliable and honourable toward all parties? These competences are vitally important for effective action but they may also exacerbate role ambiguity. Then there remains the issue of the time and energy demands upon the change agent. The work of the change agent consists of a great deal of "process time", supervision and support, meetings, coaching and so on, and it seems to be difficult to plan. Using research (in order to analyse and reflect) in his/her work can help the change agent in "managing time". But it can also help to build knowledge about such complex processes as organisational development and shaping communities of work.

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