

# Methodology of the evidential

## Research and sense giving in processes of organizational development

Adriaan Bekman (2005)

In this chapter I want to describe an approach we can use to research in a “dialogical way” our own creation – the organization. Through that process we create sense giving for this creation as well as we find the next development step of this creation, the organization.

I will start this chapter by describing four relevant scientific methodologies, that give us the epistemological starting points for the methodology of the evidential as it will be described here. Then I will enlighten the characteristics of this approach, offer some ways of acting with it in the form of exercises and end with an illustrating example.

My aim is to make this methodology available for all who work with organizational change and development questions and processes in practice. It can also be of interest for researchers that do research on questions of changing, developing and innovating organizations.

## Introduction

In social sciences I see 4 innovative research methodologies as they have been developed for the researching of social questions and issues, that I find attractive and can connect to.

### Action-Research Methodology

We have seen the rise of the Action Research methodology. In this approach the interaction between researcher and reality is put at the center of the methodology. Barney G. Glaser and Anselm M. Strauss presented in 1967 their “The discovery of Grounded Theory”. They criticized the dualistic sociological methodology of that time, that used on the one hand the quantitative, analytical approach and on the other hand the down to earth qualitative approach based on speculative assumptions.

During the seventies the Action Research methodology looked for a new way of doing social research. Action research can be described as:

*A family of research methodologies which pursue action (or change) and research (or understanding) at the same time. In most of its forms it does this by*

- *using a cyclic or spiral process which alternates between action and critical reflection and is*
- *continuously refining its methods, data and interpretation in the light of the understanding developed in the earlier cycles.*

*It is thus an emergent process, which takes shape as understanding increases; it is an iterative process which converges towards a better understanding of what happens. In most of its forms it is also participative (among other reasons, change is usually easier to achieve when those affected by the change are involved) and qualitative. (Dick, 1999).*

## Social-Constructivism methodology

A second interesting approach to researching social questions is constructivism. It is based on post modern philosophical and sociological views. Scientists like Weick, Chia and van Dongen represent this approach. The essence of their thinking is that the individual can see the social reality as an interactive reality. The key point as I once heard van Dongen say is “who is what and what is who”, which expresses the point that all is observed by human beings, observations of different persons differ from each other and it is only afterwards that we are able to make interpretations, different interpretations of what has happened and of what does it mean. The story is constructed afterwards through interaction with each other. Chia concludes that traditional modernist science is “downstream”, it is researching in crystallized beddings. He wants to see more “upstream” research where the stream of events is unpredictable. Weick shows us that we cannot find objective research in social reality, while this reality evolves and shows itself under our hands. Only afterwards we can reflect from memory on what we think has happened. Then we see that different observations and interpretations play a role with those people that are involved in the process.

Dian Marie Hosking describes the difference between the traditional and critical scientific approach like this:

*Mainstream discourses construct organizations as relatively stable and singular entities acting in relation to a more or less turbulent environment. Given these (and related) understandings, change can only be understood as moving from one stable state to another (unfreeze-move-refreeze). The Subject (change agent) attempts to achieve change by empirical-rational analysis of what is, producing knowledge “about” (i.e., propositional knowledge of) how things are and should be, as a basis for influencing – for re-forming other. These discourses reduce processes (in this case knowing and influencing) to input-outcome and feedback relations within and between entities. (Hosking and Morley, 1991).*

A relevant example of a methodology based on this standpoint is the 4th generation evaluation of Guba and Lincoln. In this methodology the researchers circulate in interaction with key persons on a question or issue in an area that is being researched. They try to find, through going different ways, the social phenomena and reflections on these phenomena expressed by the people involved in the issue/question. When no new information is detected anymore and no new images arise then, in interaction with those involved, the findings will be transformed into next steps in the process that deals with the issue/question. This social constructivist methodology uses post modern findings in social research. It wants to make a difference to the so-called objective sciences methodology as applied in empirical social research.

Modern sciences are part of today’s problems says Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens. Science can no longer pretend to be objective and to make objective statements. Science is no longer the protector of the truth and cannot make generalizations. We can only learn through science by reflecting together on the findings with the help of a sound methodology.

## Chaos-Theory methodology

Another interesting approach we meet is chaos theory (Gleick, 1986). The pioneer of this theory Gleick says:

*Where chaos begins, classical science stops. For as long as the world has had physicists inquiring into the laws of nature, it has suffered a special ignorance about disorder in the atmosphere, in the fluctuations of the wildlife populations, in the oscillations of the heart and the brain. The*

*irregular side of nature, the discontinuous and erratic side – these have been puzzles for science, or worse, monstrosities. (Gleick, 1987, p.3)*

Greuling gives us a short description of what chaos theory is and can do.

*Chaostheorie ist wesentlich eine Disziplin, die sich müht die verborgene Ordnung hinter dem chaotischen Verhalten aufzuspüren. Ein einfaches Beispiel dafür ist der tropfende Wasserhahn. Erhöht man den Durchfluss des Wasserhahns, dann erhöht sich – zunächst – ganz regelmäßig die Frequenz der Tropfen – Bis zu einer gewissen Stelle, an der das System chaotisch tropft. Um solche dynamische Systeme besser beschreiben zu können, führte Henri Poincare eine bestimmte Art von Diagrammen ein: die so genannten Phasenräume – eine abstrakte Darstellung des Raums aller Möglichkeiten. Hier im Beispiel der Tropfen trägt man zum Beispiel die Zeitdifferenzen von jeweils drei aufeinander folgende Tropfen auf – was sich zeigt, ist keineswegs ein "Chaos", sondern ein ganz charakteristisches Muster. (Greuling)*

Chaos theory is further developed by scientists that want to overcome the limits of cause – effect reasoning and objective – subjective standpoints that underlie the empirical approach. Inspired by the weather research, where it is difficult to predict the weather of the next period, they found that there are underlying patterns that can metamorphose into different patterns on the basis of very small interventions. This was expressed by the image of a butterfly in Japan that moves its wings and through a series of interactions with other movements the process ends up in a thunderstorm in the USA. We live with many simultaneous interactions and effects of deeds of many involved that have on the surface an unpredictable character. Afterwards we can research the sequence of events and before we can give prognoses of what might happen. Chaos theory and methodology open for us the way to deal with complex, paradox social phenomena that we do not have to reduce to manageable standards and repeatable interpretations. We do not have to exclude. We can leave the social reality intact and learn to know about it.

### **Developmental-Theory Methodology**

A fourth methodology we discovered is the developmental methodology introduced by Bernard Lievegoed (1964), Cees Zwart (1972) and Lex Bos (1974).

They represent a methodology that:

1. is used as a conceptual framework for clarifying as well as creating organization development and change processes in organizations;
2. is based on an interactive developmental vision concerning human and societal development processes, inspired by spiritual sciences;
3. is part of visionary and critical reflections on organization and management practices as well as concepts like the ones developed by Peter Drucker (1969) and Henri Mintzberg (1987).

This methodology is adequate for researching the organized community and its processes of development, change and innovation as they are handled by practitioners in organizations. This methodology uses the tension between the individual being and the community as its foundation. It is the creating principle for social issues in our times of individualized consciousness and organized communities.

Bernard Lievegoed describes the essence of this methodology in his book *Organisaties in Ontwikkeling, zicht op de toekomst* like this:

*In our conception of social development the key point is that a social organism is always 'en route', coming from a specific past and moving into its own future. The given past is made out of 'done choices' that lead to institutions with concepts, values and motives that must be accepted as given facts. In its own future there we find the freedom, the possible new choice of aims and policies.*

*The development of a social organism is always embedded in a bigger field. Each social system is a sub-system of a bigger system. The internal development is always influenced by concepts, values and motives that work as parameters on the own system. Each social organism one must see in the light of the surrounding 'culture'. Developmental action (social action) is for that reason a process with an internal and an external side. Not only is the social organism influenced by its surrounding culture, but this culture is also being influenced by the social system.*

Lievegoed describes three characteristics of development and these are:

1. Development is a discontinuous process, irreversible moving in time, following the principle – global starting model, differentiation, integration – towards becoming a system of higher complexity;
2. Through this a step by step up the ladder process is emerging, whereby older levels of subsystems can keep a sleepy existence;
3. Through development there comes a leveled structure into existence.

Lievegoed and his colleagues describe in many variations the development process of man and organization and they see in this developmental vision the adequate approach for and the right way of looking at the human creation, that is the organization, in our times.

### **Key points**

Out of these 4 methodologies I have distilled some essential points.

Action and reflection go hand in hand. Research is a cyclic, dialogical process. During the research process understanding of what happened arises.

We can only understand afterwards. Those who are involved have different observations and interpretations of what happened. Afterwards we construct our reality, give it sense and we do this in an interactive way.

Our research close to the original source, where effects are unpredictable, enlarges our insights in what happened. This requires a different approach than we can use in downstream process beddings with predictable results.

Behind the observable, turbulent upstream reality, patterns are working that structure the, on first sight chaotic, phenomena.

Researching complex paradox phenomena requires that we do not exclude, but that we include during the process of understanding and interpreting.

Researching is a cyclic process in which the ones who are involved make 'maps of understanding' together that help the process to continue. The researcher designs the process.

Those who are involved in the process live with steering convictions that direct their actions. Issues and questions in the social reality call forward processes of development, change and innovation. These processes are at the same time reflective and initiating by nature and they appear in organized contexts. The human individual being and the organized community are contextual research frameworks that set the boundaries to the research field.

These key points form the theoretical framework for the methodology of the evidential I will describe. I see this methodology of the evidential primarily as a way to create sense giving in organizations through processes of organization development. My basic assumption is that – in contrast to the natural creation in which objectivity and truth are evidentially existent – in all that we as human beings create there is no self evidence of existence and therefore no continuation of our creation by itself. We can observe this in the fact that all that we create as human beings will disappear again immediately or slowly unless we take care of it ourselves and maintain it. So we will also have to create the sense of all our creations regularly if there is going to be progress and continuity. In that respect I see the organization as the ultimate human creation in which the evidential of this creation can only be continued through our own maintaining it and caring for it and by adding adequate sense to it again and again.

Processes of organization development can be seen firstly as processes for creating this sense and continuity. We do this through processes of changing and innovating organizational constructs, co-operating constellations of people, as well as our steering convictions. For that we need a specific methodology and process of research and experimentation.

The methodology of the evidential as I have called it can be adequate for this purpose. It came into existence through a process of systematic reflection on and experimentation in change and innovation processes in organizations. I will describe now the seven characteristics of this methodology of the evidential.

## Characteristics of the methodology of the evidential.

### Iterative and interactive

This methodology is iterative and interactive which means that observed phenomena are being interpreted afterwards through interaction between those who were and are involved. A responsible person initiates this in networks of people and takes with them methodical steps in the social reality. This responsible person works in a cyclic, repetitious, but always a bit different way. This creates a dialogical process with the involved people and it leads them to insights in the essentials of the question or issue. Reflection and action as a process are combined rhythmically for this.

In a Bank the general director wonders why the young co-workers show little initiative. He asks two process owners to investigate this. The two invite 7 managers and ask them the question. Only one of the seven can give a personal example of an initiative taken. She has illegally given her young co-workers the responsibility to talk to clients that have passed the credit limit, something she did not like to do herself. To her surprise this has had a very positive effect on clients, co-workers and herself. The two process owners decide to create a company wide process for young co-workers who will be allowed to take, individually or with another colleague, a valuable initiative based on client and company needs for change. The young co-workers do the whole process themselves and after half a year they report and present the results to the general director, their bosses and the two process owners. This starts a process in which all young co-workers and that are several hundreds of them are given this opportunity. More than 90% of them reach a valuable result in terms of client satisfaction, company results and personal learning. They were able to involve the colleagues, to co-operate with them and to present the results to the management and the general director.

## Cyclic and Longitudinal

This methodology is cyclic and longitudinal. This means that 'time' plays a central role in the sense that questions in the social reality manifest themselves in happenings and these questions return with a certain regularity. The happenings enroll themselves in a certain sequence. Facts and happenings are identified in the past and are being investigated in a reflective way. Happenings are researched in the here and now and are experienced in their concrete sequence as well as investigated. Future happenings are initiated by choices and decisions that should lead to next steps for instance in the form of experiments.

A Rotterdam harbor company faces troubles around its general director. The general director is criticized by the governmental supervisor for acting too freely and being difficult to control. The general director reacts by starting in his company a cultural change process. The company's coworkers and the governmental supervisor are being involved in this process from the start. In the context of this process the power position of the general director changed. There is a team of directors to be installed, they split the power. Research shows that at certain intervals in the past this conflict of interest between the general director and the governmental supervisor appeared, also with the predecessors. The years afterwards this conflict re-appear regularly despite all measures taken. A regular reshuffling of power happens and that process is each time expressed in the daily newspaper as hot news.

## Biographical

The methodology is biographical because it concerns organisms and human creations that are being investigated: it is about people, organizations, institutions, communities that live and write a biography of their own. All living organisms write a unique biography. In this biography there is metamorphoses and "Steigerung" going on, which means that each organism transforms itself in time to a higher level of consciousness.

In a governmental service office a manager describes her approach in leadership. It is her vision and standpoint that above all she should base her actions on her own uniqueness and also meet the other on this basis of the unique personality of each individual. She is always interested to hear from the other person his or her own vision and what the next steps are that will be taken. 'I want to keep as many people on board as possible and to realize that I am willing to shape more space in goals to reach and roads to go on' she says. Some colleagues think she is a difficult person and she is stubborn. They tell her to put more pressure on her people and show more 'balls'. 'I only function good in a team where variety is allowed' she says. 'If that is not possible then they should not take me in'. In time more colleagues have chosen to work out of their authentic being.

## Narrative

The methodology is narrative because she uses living, vital descriptions of happenings, incidents, meetings, creative acts, confrontations and conflicts. Also moments of value creation as they appear in social reality, in the life practice, in the process of social questioning are being investigated. These descriptions, images, expressions are exemplary and can lead to other happenings and happening descriptions. This leads to imaginative material of the process that evolves itself in relation to the question to be researched and those are images that inspire and appeal to the persons involved in the process. It creates consciousness and brings us in movement to search for the next step so that the process can continue itself.

An organization came into existence by the merger of different older organizations. After a while the top management asks the question how this organization can become one whole. The idea arises to

use video and help the co-workers to film their work processes and tape characteristic stories they have to tell as they experience them in the work process. This gives a valuable variety of images that the community can look at and can share together. Also the higher management looks at these images. The question arises what the connection might be between the policy stories of the top management as they are regularly expressed in the company and the expressed work process realities of co-workers shown in the video film.

### Symptomatological

The methodology is symptomatological because the description of concrete, single happenings are being investigated on the underlying convictions and patterns. Based on concrete descriptions of concrete events the underlying convictions and patterns are being identified that give direction to the events. In every detail the whole is hidden. Symptoms are appearances of complex constellations of multi variable life realities that express themselves in a unique way as a whole. We want to capture the expression of the multi variable reality and fix it in a symptomatological way. How the researched issue expresses itself in the social reality in relation to the steering conviction that is what counts.

An organization grows quickly because of her fantastic products that are sold in many countries in the world. The internal processes must be adapted continuously towards this growth. This concerns new production facilities, a complex planning process, changing labour conditions. That creates tension between co-workers. Each time that something goes wrong fingers are pointed to the others. The tension rises. The general director makes an intervention. In a specifically designed change process the problematic interfaces between departments, that must co-operate with each other all the time, are being investigated by groups of co-workers themselves. As a consequence some work processes are re-designed, for instance the process of developing and introducing new products. Co-workers rise to the awareness that it is not always the other person that is the problem.

### Phenomenological

This methodology is phenomenological because we connect to phenomena and observables. It is about what one can observe, the expression of what concretely happened and what was created in social contexts as it can also be observed by the others. Phenomena are facts, concrete experiences and observations of expressions of social interaction and action. A research field is identified and boundaries are set. Within this field the phenomena are being located and documented.

In the meeting of the team many issues are being discussed. Participants start to notice that the same points tend to return. It is also seen that these points are discussed in an abstract way. By doing it like this, each one of the participants comes to a different interpretation and agreements made do not hold. When at occasions examples and facts are mentioned and described the discussion becomes more concrete. All understand better what it is about although it also arises shame somehow. When concrete examples are used and facts are mentioned, for instance we see what the size of the issue is, then the interaction improves and differences in interpretation become more clear, agreements become more concrete and are better held afterwards.

### Empirical

The methodology is empirical because during the process it is checked with all those involved how they see the research results and if they find them relevant. This clarifies how broad the question and process is living in the community and how it is experienced and observed by the community members.

Each year the co-workers in this organization are asked what issues for change they see that should be tackled. In groups they dialogue on this. The issues that come up are transformed into questions and put into a questionnaire that each one of the organization members can fill in. Managers and co-workers all score the questions. Statistical data is fed back to them. Each team sees their score and the score of the whole. Teams discuss the results and can decide to start initiatives and processes to tackle the issues themselves when seen as important to act on.

These seven characteristics of the methodology of the evidential are used in the research practice in an interrelated way by the people involved in the process. In general this happens mostly in a quite unconscious way. This methodology support however the precise, creative handling by responsible people of organization development and change processes. This enlarges the chance that one can approach social reality in such a way that one

- does her justice,
- find the point for the next intervention.

## Application and ways to act

After describing the theoretical basis and the characteristics of the methodology of the evidential I will concentrate now on the application of it. What ways to work with the methodology are there? How can this methodology be used? First I will describe three possible exercises using the methodology. Then I will illustrate the application by describing a concrete example.

### Three basic ways of using the methodology

To experience the methodology one has to apply it. We can educate ourselves for that by exercising three possibilities of acting in processes of developing and changing organizations.

The first opportunity to act is exercising continuous dialogue in social reality as this reality is created by ourselves. The second opportunity to act is researching and changing work processes as they are constructed and done by people at work. The third opportunity to act is making conscious the steering convictions as they work in our doing. What steering convictions direct our reflecting and acting? Continuous dialogue, changing work processes and making the steering convictions explicit I see as the key points to concentrate on in the process of researching and initiating development – change – innovation processes.

#### Opportunity to act 1: exercising dialogue in the social reality.

We become conscious of the question in our social reality by communicating to others. The way we experience and observe the social reality is questioning it and exploring it. The dialogue with the other and 'exploring together the question' brings us 'inside the question'. Now it is important to do this questioning with a methodological consciousness. One can do this using our dialogical approach.

#### The dialogical approach

Person A tells person B a question/issue that appears in his workplace/work process. Person A wants to clarify this question. Person B asks person A questions that help A to describe the question/issue more clearly. This requires concrete examples described by A that create an image of what might be the issue here. Also B explores with A how he is related to the issue and what role does the question

play in the biography of A and his organization. Together they try to identify A's next step in dealing with the question/issue.

The aim of B's questioning is not 'to understand himself what the issue is' but 'to help A to express better the issue'. B concentrates on how A expresses the issue and how A relates to the issue. This brings A in the position of confronting himself with the question/issue and to get a clear view on it. The effect is that the question changes and that A sees new opportunities to act.

An essential quality for dialoguing in this way is the listening capacity. To strengthen the listening quality B can listen on three levels to A.

The first level is following A. What is A saying? This requires concentration.

The second level is sensing. What does this mean for A? This needs empathy.

The third level is discovering the will direction of A. Does A see a next step to make? This requires courage.

By listening like this there is an inner space opened in A by B in which A can express him/herself. The social reality around an issue gets meaningful when those persons involved are in dialogue with each other, when the issue is connected to the biography of the people involved and the organization and when they continue the process together making steps and reflecting on the workings of these steps.

## Opportunity to act 2: The researching and changing of work processes

We research work processes and do interventions through which the work process changes. The work process, the result of the work process and the concrete activities in the work process form the observables of an organization in action in which people create social realities changing them and innovating them. The observables give the material for the question being researched. People do work processes and change work processes while doing the work process. They do this for instance with viewpoints like:

- The work process is directed to customers needs,
- There is flow in the work process,
- Waste is minimized,
- We create quality and co-operate together.
- People in the work process themselves research the process and change it. To be able to do this they can use the method described here.

### Work process analyses

A group of co-workers chose a work process that does not go well. They identify who is the client of this work process. Who is the one that uses the results of this work process?

They analyze the work process on three levels:

1. First level: what is the sequence of activities of this work process starting from the client?
2. Second level: what are the constellations of people co-operating in each work process activity?
3. Third level: who is the decision maker, who is responsible?

After the group has visualized the work process on these three levels they identify the red spots in it. Red spots mean structural disconnections/bottlenecks in the work process that are observable and can be improved. This should lead to better client service, a better flow, less waste and better co-operation. For each red spot the group can work out the valuable idea for changing it. They select best opportunities and start experimenting the improvements in practice. By doing this research and improvement process the people involved in the process can connect better to the work process reality and create in this way an intensive, responsible way of dealing with it.

### Opportunity to act 3: Discovering steering convictions in our inner world that direct behavior

We research our inner world and how this inner world is connected to the social reality that we create ourselves. Values and norms, convictions and ideologies work in us and they show themselves in steering convictions. These steering convictions direct our actions and behavior in a concrete situation and they give it sense.

To be able to change our actions and behavior we must discover the steering convictions and bring them in movement. We can do this through integrating new ideas in ourselves and by gaining experiences in situations unknown to us. We can respond to these situations through different behavior and actions. This gives us an opportunity to act in a new way in the social reality and also to see this reality in a different way than we did before. We developed an approach for identifying the steering convictions.

#### Identifying the steering convictions

We choose a concrete situation in the recent past in which the question was alive. From memory we describe the situation as concrete and precise as possible, like a film with running images. We characterize the described situation by formulating what has been striking us in the description. We try together to identify a dominant steering conviction as it appeared in the behavior of a key person acting in the situation. We analyze how things went in the process and if this indicate the need for change of this steering conviction. What could be a new steering conviction that would direct the behavior and acting of this person in a new way, that could lead to desirable effects?

In this way we can gain insights in dominating steering convictions that direct our actions and behavior in concrete situations. This can lead to new impulses to search for new ideas, open up to new experiences in new unknown situations and integrate these new experiences and insights in our acting and behavior.

We described three opportunities to act in which we can apply in a conscious way this methodology, experience it and learn to see it. This raises our sensitivity while being involved in processes of organization development, change and innovation in the social reality.

### Application of the methodology of the evidential

*How can the methodology of the evidential be applied as a research methodology in processes of organization development?*

I describe firstly in an abstract way the application of the methodology of the evidential in a research process in the context of an organizational development process within the organized community. Then I will describe a concrete example. How is the application of this methodology working abstractly described?

Someone in the community wakes up to a question. The question has shown itself in frictions, incidents, conflicts, breaking through patterns, processes of value creation or destruction. The question is put into words in the context of the community involved. This creates the start of a process of development. When an individual gets the responsibility to tackle the question, a process of change and innovation starts and organization development and sense giving appear. The question is being researched. Who is connected to this question? Did we see this question arise before in the biography of the organized community? How is the question alive in the inner world of people

involved? How long ago did we see this question appear and what do we expect for the future to appear?

In a circular process the responsible person searches for people that can tell something related to the question. Stories are written down, reflections and memories are being documented. Also interpretations and judgments are being registered. How serious, existential did the people involved experienced the question, what tension did it rise, what meaning did it trigger. The one respondent points to the next one to be talked to, till there is no new information coming to the surface.

The responsible person also searches for facts and data that can support or contradict the founded stories. Through concrete observations and through analyzing material the picture of the question get more body. The responsible person experiences the question in practice and observes it, together with others. Through checking in an empirical way how the people involved have seen the question it becomes clear that the question is relevant for the community and that it plays a role in the interaction and experience of people involved.

The responsible person reflects on the done research interventions and how the question came alive and changed during the research process. There appear opportunities for change in the social reality. They become visible: changes in constellations of people, in work processes, in steering convictions are initiated.

Applying this methodology make the question become observable and the people in the process find opportunities to work together on that question. A process of consciousness building and decision making around this social question arises. The opportunity to take initiatives open up.

### A practice case

In 2001 I am invited to present this methodology to a group of social scientists and entrepreneurs in Italy. This group lives with the question how an enterprise as an organized community can be developed in a responsible and sustainable way. The methodology seems to have a lot in common with how Olivetti developed in the past his company into a living community being focused on development and innovation in all possible fields. Out of this first encounter a process was started and different workshops for entrepreneurs, managers and professionals were organized. In one of these workshops a young entrepreneur participated. He was the vice-president of an industrial company, managing the mother company. He had been trying to change his company but he failed in his opinion. The presented methodology could be for him a last chance to succeed, he thought.

The vice-president is the son in law of the most important owner of this enterprise. This enterprise consists of 4 companies of which two of them have been taken over in the last years. Some of the family members, occupying influential positions like sales, finances and production management, dominate the scene. The father in law takes care of sales and marketing. He finds the business in the market. He is the patriarch. His will is law. The vice-president feels impotent and was not able in the past three years to give a substantial contribution to the enterprise. "I have been sleeping for three years" he says. "I have lost my force and inspiration".

### The situation

The vice-president entered the enterprise after having worked in a multinational company in the English head office. His father in law appealed to him to come to the family enterprise. He was needed, he said. Three years have passed and what did he contribute? All power is in the hands of the father in law. The four companies produce parts for electrical motors and all four companies have serious problems. There are new clients and new orders but there is a growing number of dissatisfied clients. Work processes stagnate, there are dissatisfied managers with a dissatisfied workforce, fluctuating profits and drastic raises in costs. The vice-president decide to make a move.

First he formulates three questions. How can family members and directors be repositioned in the four companies, based on their competences? How to create a clear difference between ownership and leadership? How to make the management to co-operate with each other and tackle the problems? How to raise profit, prevent fluctuations in profit and have a consistent investment policy?

In many dialoguing sessions with owners, family members, directors and managers he explores these questions and decide to create a systematic process of organization development, supported by a consultant working out of the methodology of the evidential. The greatest threshold for the vice-president is his own anxiety to take the steering wheel and confront his father in law with that different approach.

After having taken the inner decision to make this step he designs two images.

1. The first image is a structure image. The four older family members and four younger family members form together the ownership board. In this board the goals, policies and investment decisions are being made. The four older family members each become president of one of the companies. The leadership however is given to the younger members who act as directors together with some non family directors. The directors develop the strategies, run the operations and lead the change and innovation process. Each director works with a management team in which unit managers participate. They lead the company and work together.
2. The second image concerns the steering of the change processes in the mother company by decision makers and process owners. The vice-president takes the role of general director of the mother company. This is the oldest company existing in the group in which 450 co-workers work. Together with his unit managers he starts a change and innovation process. Operational issues are tackled in a systematic way and parallel to that the needed changes are implemented by the management itself in the context of specially designed processes leaded by selected process owners. Process owners are nominated for issues like cost saving, budgeting and work process improvement.

After a three month struggle to establish his new structure and way of working the key players agree to give it a try. The vice-president finds himself now in a drastically changed situation.

*My father in law is the president and he has decided everything up till now. He sees me as his personal assistant. Now I have decided for myself to act out of my own responsibility in a systematic way. Each week I meet my management team and we dialogue on issues like client service, cost saving, work process improvement, changing the constellations and the teams. I have now several teams working on the changes needed. I changed the structure of the company. We have now clear units with unit managers. We redesign the whole process from selling – ordering – planning – producing – to delivering. We tackle the bottlenecks in it. I hope through these interventions to get a better rhythm in the company. Up till now hectic situations and permanent pressure are the case. This will lead to disaster in the end when we do not succeed with our changes. My father in law tries to understand my different way of working but it is hard for him. We can however now handle his explosions in a better way. When all managers start to work in a systematic way we will have a better flow, a different consciousness and more inner security.*

The first year

In the first year many interventions in the work processes are made. These interventions are done in a dialogical way involving all relevant people in the process of change, given them challenges to contribute.

The mother company services hundreds of clients in many countries in and outside Europe. Each client is treated in a similar way. There is no difference between bigger and smaller clients and there is no insight in the individual clients added value. Ten percent of the produced goods have to be reproduced. Twenty percent of the deliveries is not in time and does not have the right specifications. Client complaints are handled at random. That is the situation.

A distinction is made between 'boutique clients' and 'supermarket clients'. Boutique clients give special orders with special specifications. Supermarket clients buy standard products from stock. For both categories of clients a separate process is designed, starting from sales via planning and programming, production and construction towards delivering and transport. For each client there is a three month forecast as well as a one month planning program in which client orders and machine specifications are connected.

The department planning and programming functions in a bad way. The planning is not correct, there are tensions with all other departments, there is a continuous change in client priorities. The department head is sacked because he does not want to tackle the problem himself. The directors assistant takes over the responsibility. He designs a new planning and programming process. He connects clients and machines, improves the co-operation with colleagues of production and tool shop and starts an intense co-operation with the sales people. IT specialists develop a monitoring program that helps to see where the client orders are in the process.

Two young co-workers develop a client – product cost calculation program. For each client one can make an added value calculation. This supports sales in client negotiations.

Reorganizing transport and warehouse for incoming and outgoing goods is urgently needed. In different warehouses all sorts of material is put at random. Finished products of years ago are still on stock. Raw materials are chaotically ordered and delivered. Internal transport is overwhelming. Transport of final products meet changing priorities all the time. That is the situation.

Warehouses are cleaned out of non-usable stock. Transport is brought into a systematic scheme that directs delivering in and outside Europe. Standard products get standard packing. Contracts with transport suppliers are renegotiated. Delivering in time is 100% for boutique clients. Standard products meet standard delivering times.

The production is reorganized. There is a three shift scheme. Workers are linked ad hoc to machines. There are 4 hierarchical levels working in the production organization.

Machines are grouped and for each group there is a team of operators working. Each team has a supervisor/foreman. Each shift has a shift supervisor. Teams are being informed on coming production targets. Tool shop workers deliver the tools in time in the production. Operators are being permanently trained on preventing machine failure. The results of all teams are shown on the wall. Foreman get special leadership training after being selected, based on their personality and craftsmanship.

A shake-up plan is introduced for reducing personnel numbers. The amount of workers was raised while production was less. The market is tense and material cost rise. Cost of personnel have to be diminished. It concerns 50 functions on a total of 450. Different ways of handling this are discussed with the managers: early pension, non performing personnel moved out, outsourcing, less hierarchical levels, reorganization and work process simplification. Concrete opportunities were analyzed. After one year 50 functions were eliminated through different ways. Production was improved at the same time.

A budget system and cost saving system was designed and implemented in one month time. Each manager got a budget in which all financial data he could influence were placed. Each manager was

asked to look for cost saving opportunities and realize them with the team. The budget system monitors on a monthly basis the money streams. Decisions to influence were made during the year and have been implemented.

No leadership training and coaching had ever been done. Key qualities of horizontal leadership were introduced to the managers and experimented with. These qualities are steering the process, coaching the people, inspiring through a vision and making interventions and setting boundaries. The question was raised: what is a good team? And how do we become a good team? Work process improvement techniques were introduced. The biographical connection between person and organization was explored. This all intensified the process of knowledge creation and leadership.

The processes as described here were monitored each month in the two day development program meetings together with process owners and unit managers. The next steps were planned, results were monitored. There was a continuous process of steering by the general director needed.

The cultural bottleneck becomes very obvious. Managers and workers struggle with the given responsibility. Their mental space was not at all prepared for that change. Through a systematic rhythmic process of repetitious exercising in the first year, slowly the consciousness arises that this new way of working is based on different steering convictions than were experienced before as they were initiated by the old pioneering generation. During a longer period these two sets of steering convictions coincide and created tension in the company. The vice-president developed during this process more personal force to take personal responsibility in family issues, ownership issues, directors and management issues. He becomes visible in the company, tackles the real issues in the company also on the work floor and develops the skill to introduce a systematic way of managing change and development creating next process steps.

## The end

The methodology of the evidential as described here was developed in the past 30 years in a dialogical process between organization development practice and contextual theory creation. In my theses *Bewogen Organisaties* (1998) and the successive book *De organisatie als gemeenschap* (2001) this process is documented. My most recent books *Kernkwaliteiten van leiderschap*(2004) and *Adviseren in verandering*(2005) build on that.

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