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**HORIZONTAL ORGANIZATION AND
LEADERSHIP: A GENERATIVE
APPROACH FOR AN ETHIC
DEVELOPMENT IN COMPLEX
SYSTEMS**

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HORIZONTAL ORGANIZING AND LEADERSHIP: A GENERATIVE APPROACH FOR AN ETHIC DEVELOPMENT IN COMPLEX SYSTEMS

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Abstract

The growing complexity of our time urgently demands management culture to be innovated, as more and more effective solutions to organization problems are not found at the top, with the traditional managerial culture, characterized by systems, procedure and control. Research shows that 80% of change projects fail or do not reach the expected results and that the main obstacle is the lack of motivation. This depends on a rationalistic, reductive vision of people and organization, considered as two independent realities. The paper shows a new way the organization and workers have to be considered, as two realities that keep evolving with synergy, in an evolutionary systemic-complex vision. On the basis of this, an approach is proposed for organizational and people development which create spaces for horizontal connections and within them generate new processes and competences towards a client oriented organization, where people can also find a place of self-development, thereby strengthening their responsibility and motivation. It is an action research and action learning approach developed within a CNR and IMO Foundation research project. It integrates a method to create a space for connections to generate horizontal processes and of a IMO methodology for leadership, which permits to generate new more responsible and aware behaviors, adding to the vertical dimension a horizontal one as well, characterized by dialogue, interactions and connections between the inner and outer world. This approach creates a new path for a responsible, ethic and sustainable development: the horizontal organizing and leadership path.

Keywords: leadership, management, ethics, competences, organization development, social responsibility, complexity, action research, action learning.

Track No: 29

Introduction

The paper proposes some findings of a CNR (Ircres Institute) research project (started in 2001) proposing to identify effective approaches to organization development and people motivation. The project involved a large group of international stakeholders in focus groups, case studies, literature analysis, interviews, experimentation of innovations, for around 10 years (Rizziato, 2010a, b, 2007, a,b; Rizziato, Nemmo, 2013, Bekman, 2004, 2010). Among other main partners of the project, particularly relevant were Prof. Francesco Novara, in-charge of the Olivetti company psychology center and Prof. Adrian Bekman, in-charge of the Dutch foundation NPI created by the psychiatrist B.C.J. Lievegoed in 1954 for his research work in teaching Social Pedagogy at Erasmus University. NPI in 2005 was developed in the international Foundation IMO, which became the main partner of the project.

The results of a first phase of the project, focused on reflections about critical aspects of the traditional change programs, highlight the need to rethink the human person and organizational vision and to change the traditional planned change programs towards generative approaches of both competences and processes. Interesting innovations for the challenges the researcher evidenced in that field were then found. Among which, we can see the necessity to involve people in the definition of change processes and to improve the quality of interactions (Pasmore in Reason, Bradbury, 2001) and specifically the quality of dialogue (Argyrys, 2010; Beer, 2011). Moreover, Bradbury, Mirvis, Neilsen, Pasmore, (2008) sustain that many companies concerned with sustainability have not created the conditions for a sustainable culture and that changing behavior is rarely easy, that launching initiatives and maintaining momentum is a great challenge. They identified the largest challenge to the next industrial revolution in three main points:

1. system thinking, working with the whole system;
2. relational know how, engaging people collectively and fully;
3. generativity, defining ourselves through what we wish to create for the future.

They evidenced the “deficit assumptions” about human nature and the necessity to involve people beyond mere conceptualization of action. Also Pardo Del Val (2012) suggest that participation of stakeholders show the way to commitment, and commitment keeps away from resistance.

Moreover, the proposed approach by the CNR-IMO project is an innovation to overcome what H. Bradbury (2015) calls the “Cartesian Catastrophe”, which separates mind and heart, reflection from action, self from the others which led, for example, to conventional healthcare research that excluded patients, and conventional education research that exclude students. Furthermore, the project proposal is answering to the questions posed at the end of the work of Hazy and Bien

(2014) about the *Complex System Leadership Theory*: “what role do identities play in storing, sharing and evolving rules of interaction? How do ethics play into this question?”. The project also contributes to the reflections on transformational leadership and creativity (Alrawi et al 2015) which focus on the necessity for leaders to improve the ability to empowering employees and inspires them to induce a great influence in the organization.

The first paragraph of the paper reflects on the critical elements of the traditional approaches to organization development, found in the project, mainly based on rationalistic and reductive image of man and organization.

The second explains a way the organization and workers are to be considered to improve change programs, which are two realities that keep evolving with synergy, with an evolutionary systemic-complex vision, oriented by their “identity”.

The third describes the innovative approach of organizational development, which combine a new method to create a space of connections for horizontal processes, that is client oriented (Rizziato 2010b), integrated with a new methodology for leadership, which creates a link between the inner and outer world, the methodology of evidential (Bekman 2004, 2010, 2014).

1. Reflections on critical elements of the traditional approaches to organization development

The literature analysis on effectiveness of change methodologies (J.J.Boonstra, L. Caluwè 2004, Novara, 2003, Pardo Del Val 2003) have shown that commonly used interventions have led to poor results or have come to a stop. This depends on a reductive vision, where the individual and organization are considered as two independent realities (Hosking, Morley,1991).

Organization behavioral interventions and Human Resources focused on the individual, considering the organization as an independent context. Also organization theories focused on designing internal functions and processes without taking into account the peculiarities of human nature within the working environment, thus making rationalistic reductions. In both cases, the result is a negative impact on motivation which becomes the major obstacle to the expected change.

The project experts focus groups, literature analysis and several interviews with managers (Rizziato 2010a) highlighted that, assuming an adequate remuneration, workers’ motivation is based on two main elements:

- to be able to perceive the social utility of the work
- to be able to give a personal contribution to organization development, by holding specific responsibilities in transforming the working reality.

Moreover, it emerged that the organization's dysfunctions cannot be solved only from within, but also need to reconnect people to their social identity, in contributing to the life of the community through products or services (Novara, 2003). Therefore, it is important to connect these elements to activate effective change processes, so that they can bring added value to the core components of the organization such as clients and people, via an efficient economic process.

The expert focus group also analyzed the anthropological and organizational models that today inspire the prevailing interventions in the market.

The vision of *homo oeconomicus*, as elementary mechanism triggered by the impulse to economic turnover, interested in achieving maximum pleasure with the least effort, is still widespread. Man is seen as "rational" in the sense of maximizing his own well-being.

Hence it has been observed that the pyramidal and functional image of the organization prevails, despite attempts to change it with the matrix or project organizations, that have shown many limits over the medium and long term. The idea is that those at the top know more than the ones lying at the bottom and so the decision-making process is handled from the top in a vertical logic of control of the decisions taken.

Attempts to change this reality led, notably in Europe, to unsatisfactory results (Novara in Rizziato 2010a, Bekman 2010), as management's claims of the bottom's empowerment, such as the quality circles, were prevailed by logical and reductive vision of work motivation, which is widely dependent on profit. Even the interesting ideas of lean thinking of Womack and Jones, suggesting the client's process as the center of change, have fallen into technical logic without the involvement of people, thus bringing often unsatisfactory results. Also the vision of the organization as a collective learning community, the learning organization of Senge, which has been transposed into a classical management mentality and applied in the field of work-related training, led to the same unsatisfactory outcome (Bekman, 2010).

The expert project focus group observed that lot of new impulses to the life of the organization has not brought the so hoped changes, because it was considered within reductive managerial visions, lacking vital links for effective change. These reflections focused on the necessity to rethink cultural references necessary to promote effective forms of development.

The group focused on a systemic-complex vision as also theorized by Moraine (1993) who underlined, like Drucker (1993), that an organization exists to "do", to carry out the task for which it was built, and that gives it its own identity (i.e. enterprise, hospital, public body etc.). In Olivetti the system complex approach was applied by Novara and evidenced that we can only generate the change with a multidisciplinary vision and with an experimental approach,

people and client oriented. This was also Lievegoed's proposal, moreover, he saw the organization's relationship with the client and the leadership in an evolutionary perspective. The group then deepened his vision and practical application with studies case from Bekman. Lievegoed introduced the concept and model of development in the organization reality, connected to the development of individuals (Lievegoed, 1973, 1979). His evolutionary vision allows an important cultural breakthrough, considered essential to promote a new level of "organizational culture" and was taken as the basis of the new approach to development, result of CNR-IMO project. Most of the focus was on how to create new spaces of interaction and the type of leadership which could help such "systemic transformations".

2. The evolutionary image of organization and man at work

Lievegoed (1973) highlight the necessity for who manage organizations to learn how to work from a model of development. For him this necessarily comes from two premises: the comprehension of ways to develop social structures and the comprehension of human development processes, to include the human being as a relevant player, for organization development. Therefore, Lievegoed recalls the foundations of Kenneth Boulding's general theory of systems (1956), who distinguishes a hierarchy of 9 levels of systems, where each higher level integrates all the lower ones, adding a new dimension that was not present at the previous level, larger for differentiation and complexity. To sum up, the 9 levels are briefly described.

1. The first level is that of the static structure. It might be called the level of *frameworks*. This is the geography and anatomy of the universe, for example, the patterns of electrons around a nucleus.

2. The second level is that of the simple dynamic system with predetermined, necessary motions. This might be called the level of *clockworks*. The solar system itself is of course the great clock of the universe from man's point of view, simple machines such as the lever, even quite complicated machines like steam engines and dynamos.

3. The next level is that of the control mechanism or cybernetic system, which might be called the level of the *thermostat*. This differs from the simple stable equilibrium system mainly because the transmission and interpretation of information is an essential part of the system.

4. The fourth level is that of the "open system," or self-maintaining structure. This is the level at which life begins to differentiate itself from not life, it was called the level of the *cell*.

5. The fifth level was called the genetic-societal level. The plant typifies it, and it dominates the empirical world of the botanist.

6. The next is the "animal" level, characterized by increased mobility and self-awareness. Here we have the development of specialized 'information receptors (eyes, ears, etc.) leading to an enormous increase in the intake of information.

7. The next level is the "human" level, that is of the individual human being considered as a system. In addition to the characteristics of animal systems, man possesses self-consciousness, which is something different from mere awareness, we can see a self-reflexive quality - he not only knows, but knows that he knows and he can develop himself in a space of freedom.

8. Then we have the social organizations. The unit of such systems is not the person but the "role": social system, as a set of roles tied together with channels of communication. At this level we must concern ourselves with the content and meaning of messages, the nature and dimensions of value systems, the transcription of images into a historical record, the subtle symbolization of art, music, and poetry, and the complex gamut of human emotion. The empirical universe here is human life and society in all its complexity and richness.

9. The last level is that of transcendental systems, which also exhibit systematic structure and relationship. It is a space where to ask questions that do not have any answers.

Lievegoed wonders if it is legitimate to transfer the concept of biological evolution to social system development and growth, according to Boulding's classification. He thinks that the biological object evolves from the simplest shape to the final predetermined one, the adult shape of the species, that is present as information from the beginning. He states that you can see a social organization as a natural biological organism, if you don't forget the difference: members of social organizations are autonomous social individuals and not the cells of a biological organism. What is at stake in modern social and political conflicts in our human organizations is the so called "adult" shape of the organization. In a biological object the final goal of the evolution is the adult shape of the species, in a social organization the adult shape is the most suitable way to reach a goal outside the system. This goal is what we call the "client process", i.e. the global experience that a client lives from the first moment he gets in touch with the organization. A social organism can evolve into a predetermined goal, if this goal is perceived and pursued by individuals, who, in that social organism, take autonomous initiative to buy in the whole group. Lievegoed believes in an "adult" shape of social organization, as a result of the effort of all its members, who work together to define that shape, regardless of significant differences in personal judgments and ideas. The "adult" shape of social organization can realize what is unique and special in the 8th level according to Boulding, only if adult individuals want

to realize a specific goal, self-consciousness, described in the 7th level. This is the challenge of the modern working community, the creation of a connection between human and social system development. *Growth and ripeness* can be used to describe a biological organism, *change and development* are suitable for people. Lievegoed (1973) presents the co-evolution of man and organization, focusing the self-consciousness of the individual in connection with the changing environment. His evolutionary view holds that development is a discontinuous, one-way process. It goes from a starting model, to differentiation, to a final integration in a more complex model. Organizational development follows a three-phase model:

- the pioneering phase
- the differentiation phase
- the integration phase.

These phases pivot around the client, that is outside the organization and can give sense and meaning to all ongoing relationships in the organization.

The “client process” is the on-progress identity of the organization and it is the “client process” that unifies, steers, makes sense in organizations.

Let’s walk through these three phases, and see how leadership, relationship with clients and internal relationships change.

Later, we will see his human being development vision, also in a wider framework, and its connections with organization development.

2.1 The development phase of an organization

The pioneering phase

It is the initial phase, when the entrepreneur establishes the opportunity to solve practical problems and offers his solutions to other people. By doing so, he generates an economic flow. In this phase everything is connected with him, processes quickly flow and communication is direct, “everyone knows everything”. The organization has the shape of a not-well-differentiated pyramid, governance is authoritarian, leadership style is hierarchical and deeply concerned with the pioneer-entrepreneur. Functions are roughly formalized, internal responsibility is not officially confirmed, communication among people is informal and direct, working approach is toward improvisation and the organization can react very well to turbulence in an external context. People can shift from several roles and functions, work is considered a “large family”, people are willing to do service, commitment is strong and every worker shares company objectives that are clear and simple.

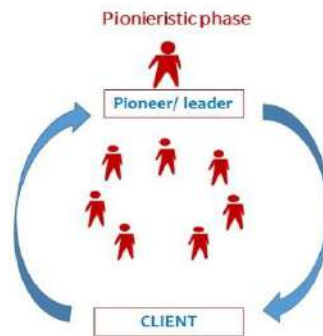


Fig 1 The first phase of an organization development

In the market, pioneering companies build strong ties with their clients. Mainly the entrepreneur has personal contacts with clients and can solve any critical aspect quickly, there is a sense of “community” based on trust in the pioneer.

The differentiation phase

When business starts growing, the organization cannot work anymore on the basis of naiveté, dysfunctions with clients and not efficient use of resources start to emerge. A step of development need in a different, more differentiated organization. Typically, pyramidal hierarchical organization are created, with separate functions, clear rules and vertical top-down decision processes. For a first period this helps to increase efficiency in a chaotic pioneering situation almost out of control. But in the time, previous vital and smooth interpersonal relationships begin to loosen, fading away into anonymous functions, managers don't have the pulse of the client anymore and the organization undergoes malfunctioning due to difficulty in feeling the organization as a whole. Often it is the case that managers go one way, following an abstract idea of service leaving their clients alone. Symptoms of organizational crisis are: distance from company values and individual values, carelessness, communication problems, less flexibility, process control problems, lack of motivation.

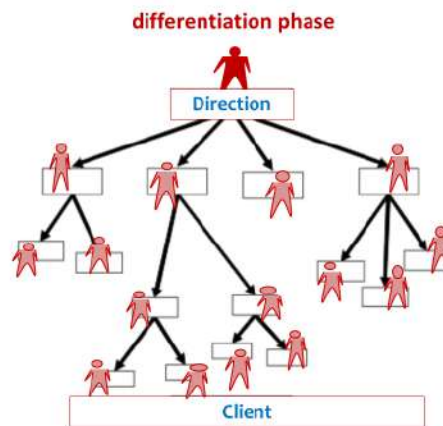


Fig 2 The second phase of an organization development

These symptoms of crisis ask for a severe re-modeling of the organization and lead to another phase of development. The weakness of this second phase is that the social sub-system of the organization is not taken into consideration, while economic and technical sub-systems thrive notwithstanding a falling motivation.

The integration phase

In the next phase, social, technical and economic systems have to start intertwine. From a competence and function based organization, where focus is on internal processes, to a process based organization, where focus is on the client and workers are proactive. To start this transformation, need a horizontal and shared vision of the client experience, which is traversal to all functions and levels of the organization. A horizontal space has to be created next to the vertical one. Each worker has to be moved by an entrepreneurial spirit to serve the organization, that in this third phase Lievegoed calls “cloverleaf organization” (see *Fig.3*, how the author re-writes it). Each person in this organization is allowed to act proactively in order to define and reach common objectives. As well as technical and economic sub-systems have strict rules, that worked to permit social progress, social sub-system calls for a road-map to twine together the three sub-systems.

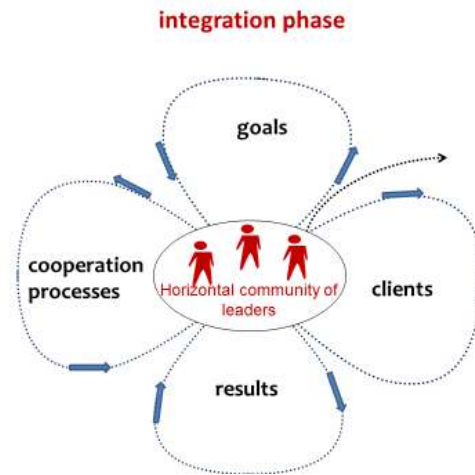


Fig 3 The third phase of an organization development

Lievegoed underlines the necessity to work for a new leadership style to permit the passage to the third phase. The new leadership has to stimulate individual initiative and entrepreneurial spirit in order to enhance social and organizational awareness.

2.2 An evolutionary vision of human being in the organization

Since the Homo aeconomicus concept and the models drawn from it have failed to describe a man able to embrace all the nuances of complexity and continuous change, we need a new paradigm and a new concept. Stanford Research Institute (Campbell et al 1982) and humanistic psychologist like Maslow (1971) define interesting and useful concepts as “individual health”, “self-realization”, full development of talents. Assaggioli’s psicosintesi is in this framework and integrates different schools and approaches and designs four basic human dimensions: physical, emotional, mental and spiritual (the last being the unifying concept). This model accepts a personal I and a trans personal Self, towards which the I tends to realize himself.

Lievegoed’s (1979) evolutionary image of man, derived from Steiner and the personalist stream, is close to this model and presumes the possibility of the I to evolve. Reality is lived considering three, interconnected levels of the psyche (thinking, feeling, willing) and the I has an ordering function. It is the I that defines the path of development which can be realized in a process of responsible action and reflection and realize what Assaggioli (1977) calls “la meta oltre la porta”, the” goal beyond the door” and what Lievegoed calls Leitmotiv, that is the biographical direction.

In the CNR-IMO project we considered that giving people at work the opportunities to be proactive, able to take decisions about improving their work process is a path toward the

realization of the personal I, following their Leitmotiv, and is a very essential issue, an ethic one. On this principle we defined the concept of “ethics of development”. This not only out of respect for the people but also for the enormous value of it can have for the organization, because it can liberate creativity and make people proactive and motivated. This emerged very clearly by analyzing several experiences in the case studies of the CNR-IMO project. It becomes also evident that this type of ethic is effective. As a result, the following evolutionary image of human being was chosen, in order to connect it to organization development.

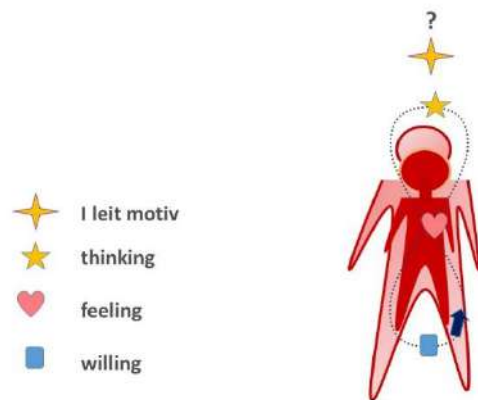


Fig 4 The evolutionary image of the human being

An evolutionary, constructivist, systemic, action research and action learning, generative approach was also chosen to connect people and organization development, as will be illustrated in the next paragraph.

In the constructivist approach the “reality” depends on how we approach, observe, know, and communicate it, comes out from relational processes and from meanings generated by our experience, as the reflexive approach tells us (Weik, 1997).

The I is the element who can unify and give sense to the different experience; it has to be considered in the framework of the “leit motiv”, the biographical orientation (Lievegoed 1973). It is important that HR policies consider these factors and make effort to create a suitable environment to enable each worker to pursue self-realization in accord with organizational challenges.

The identity of the organization, given by the client service and the individual identity, can be the result of a motivating and evolutionary synergy. Francesco Novara (1996) brilliantly stated:

“the “ideal of the organization” picks up the “ideal of the I” and the goals of the organization become the goals of the “ideal I”...”.

3. The approach developed: a space of generative connections for horizontal processes and leadership

As result of CNR-IMO project, a new approach is presented for an effective and sustainable organization development, based on a method which creates spaces of generative connections for horizontal processes (Training Development in Rizziato 2010b), integrated with a methodology to create a new type of leadership, the horizontal leadership, with the methodology of evidential (Bekman 2004, 2010, 2014). This methodology stimulates changes in behavior, adding to the vertical dimension a horizontal one as well, characterized by dialogue, interactions and connections between the inner and outer world. It considers leadership as a dialogic process, where each individual appeal to the other as a person, not as a role, to explore the possible development step. Horizontal leadership do not guide people, but processes, where people can act responsibly toward a common goal, so strengthening personal motivation.

The approach takes as foundation, the individual and organization evolutionary vision explained in the previous paragraph and is characterized by the generation of new processes and behaviors step by step, in a path of action and reflection, with a specific rhythm, depending on the needs of the organization.

The proposed approach considers that we move in a systemic complex evolutionary environment and analytical and planning methodologies are of no use.

We focused on connections between people and organization, guided by the development of both “identities” in explorative and experimental way. The development of the organization follows the client process improvement, in connection with the steps workers can take toward this goal. In doing so, they can reflect on their development areas and sense making for their I development, in a generative path. The client has to return to being central to the organization strategy and this means rethinking the processes design.

The theoretical basis of the approach is constructivism, action research, action learning, adult learning, neuroscience, humanistic psychology, social psychology, evolutionary theories of man and organization.

The proposed approach work in two steps:

- create a horizontal space of connections for horizontal processes;
- create a generative, cyclic development and learning path.

1-Create a horizontal space of connections for horizontal processes

To start with, it is important that directors can share a horizontal and evolutionary vision and strategy, connected to the client process improvement, as the identity of the organization and ordering element of the complexity.

They also have to share the view that workers are synthesis elements of complexity, not “human resource to manage” and the importance to identify a selected group of workers, to start a generative process of sustainable change, which will involve, step by step, all the working community.

The community of directors will then choose a group of “developers”, activating and connecting them with the horizontal development strategy. The developers will involve the colleagues in the change with a dialogical, explorative and experimental path, using the methodology of evidential for horizontal leadership. Directors, working as a community, will sustain the cultural change from the steering principle of vertical working process, that is *how to rationalize processes* to the steering principle of the horizontal working process, that is *how to create added value for the client*.

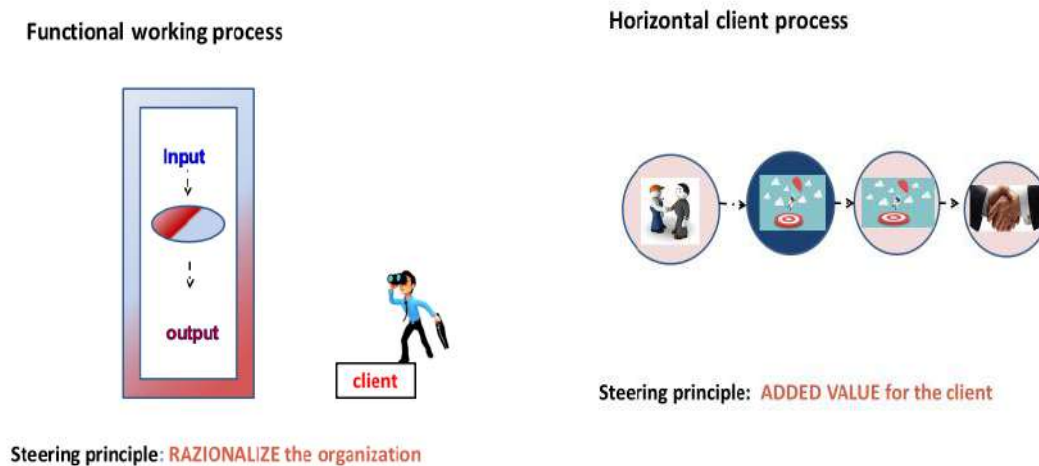


Fig.5 steering principle of processes in the second phase and third phase of the organization

To create fruitful connections for development, a new “development infra-structure” will be created, which will represent the space of a new organizational leadership, where the issues about change needs, will be shared and oriented in a generative path. A horizontal dimension is added to the vertical one.

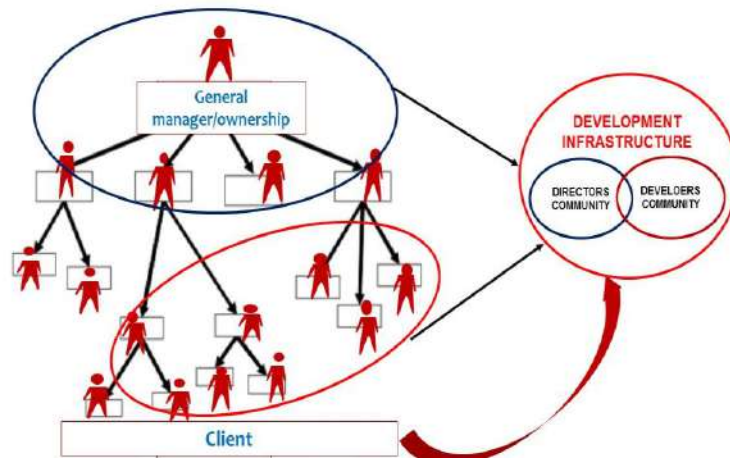


Fig.6 From the second phase to the third phase of organization development

This development infrastructure will be the centre to generate integrated organizations thanks to a training about horizontal leadership. They will integrate the vertical and horizontal dimensions.

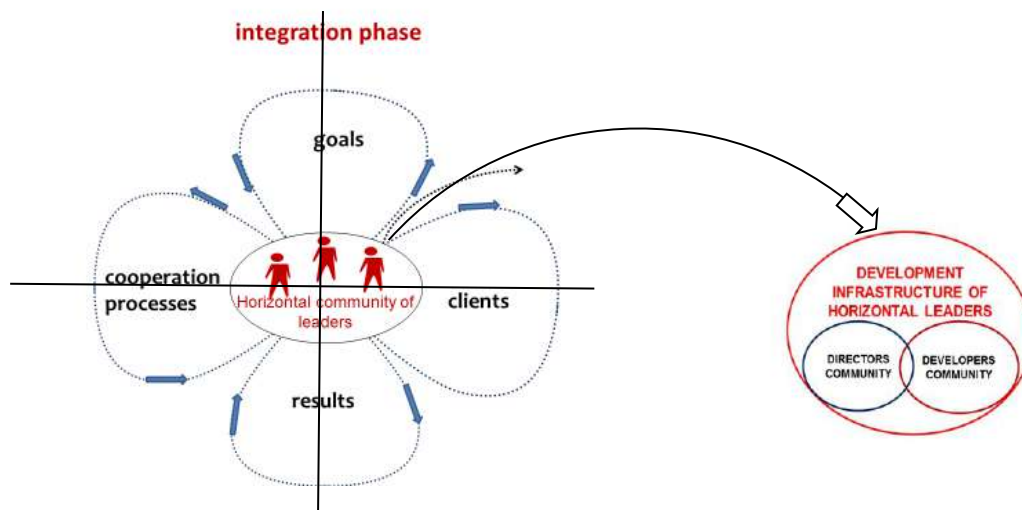


Fig.7 The integrated organization with the development infra structure of horizontal leaders

2-Create a generative, cyclic development and learning path

The two communities will follow a cyclic development path of action research and action learning.

For the directors community it will be a path of defining a horizontal strategy and acquiring horizontal leadership competencies.

For the developers it will be a more practical way to explore the questions of change, sharing it with the wider community and collecting ideas, to experiment with new possible ways to change

the process, even more horizontally, in order to give added value to the client, while growing in their personal competences.

Both the groups will follow an Exploration Macro phase to identify the real issues, share them, collect ideas for improvement and to experiment them. The two groups will meet regularly as a Development Infrastructure, a space where they can share the exploration and experimentation results and decide the successive steps, considering the added value for clients, people and capital. Every new process will be issued only after experimentation and “validation” by the whole community.

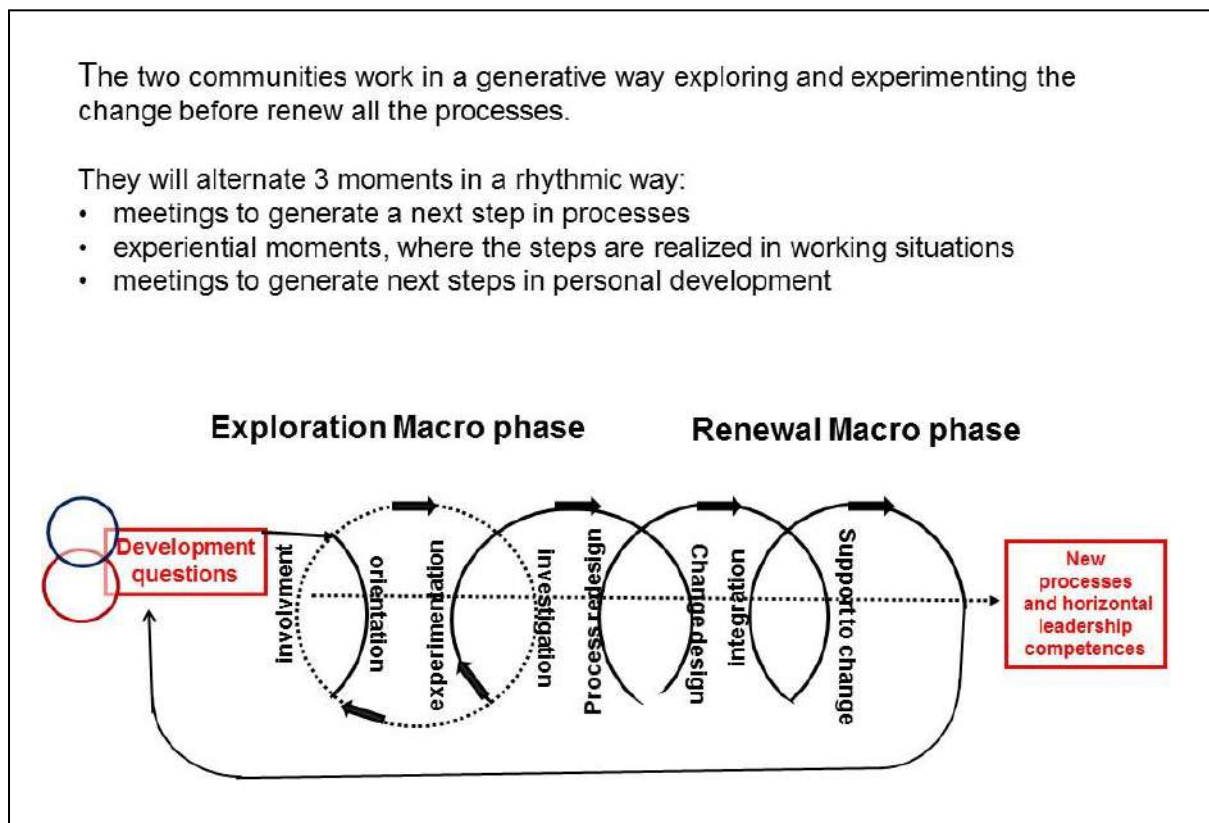


Fig.8 The cyclic development path

Transversely to the two macro phases, the two communities will generate new processes and competences as horizontal leaders, thanks to specific exercises of the methodology of evidential, others developed in the CNR-IMO action research project and a reflection- propection-action paths of transformative learning (see image 9)

It is essential the definition of the next step, which permits to explore the reality behind the abstract ideas people have and then reflect on the findings, both for the processes and for the opportunities for personal change. This synergic way of working is well described in the image

hereunder about the transformative learning path. The start will be the observation about the critical elements for the client, focusing on the steering principle behind it, which will be renewed with the focus on the added value for the client. In the transformative learning path, people explore the real chances of change as “acting agents”, that is horizontal leaders. They will reorient vertical process into horizontal one step by step, identifying the steering principle lying under processes not effective for the clients, defying the new one and sharing it with the working community, projecting the new step in an explorative way and doing it. In reflecting on the critical aspects of the steps done they can see their behavioral “steering principles” and change them, if need as, with the same approach.

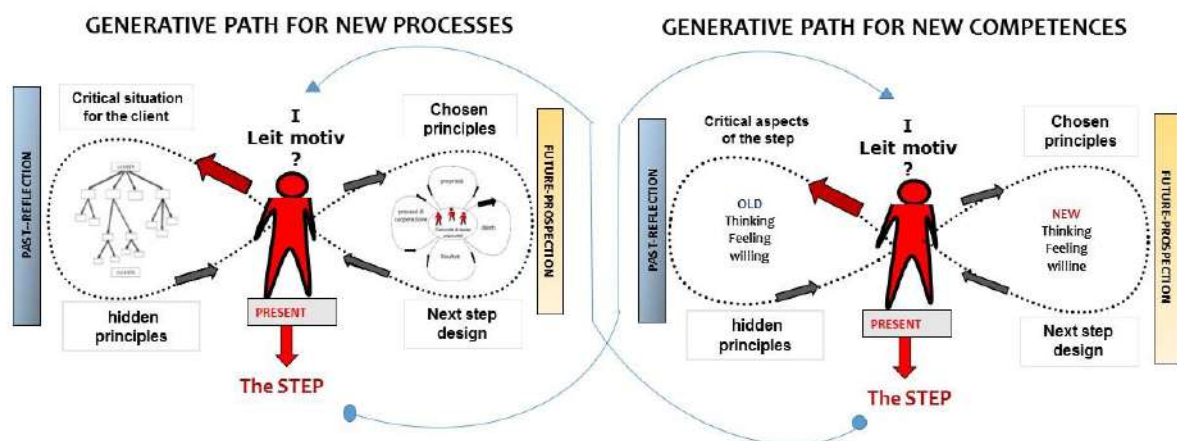


Fig. 9 The path of transformative learning

After each step and reflection, people acquire new perspective to observe the processes and can generate new and better aware steps. They also gain new “developing competences”, becoming step by step horizontal leaders, (Rizziato, Nemmo, 2018, Bekman, 2010).

We already have a good record of successes following this approach in different type of organizations: profit, nonprofit, public. It is a way for the creation of modern communities in the working place, as places of sense.

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