

## **Interactive self-steering**

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Institutions such as churches, politics, business, social institutions and families are losing their grip on people. To quote the philosopher Cornelis: natural connections and social infrastructures are losing their power and the trust of the people who depend on them.

One example is the actions of the Dutch tax authorities and politicians in connection with the benefits scandal, which has caused problems for many people. Other examples include youth care and the subsidence and damage to homes in Groningen as a result of gas extraction. The current government seems incapable of dealing with social issues in a meaningful and effective way. Voters are losing interest.

So what is the solution? A small example is how the residents of my street help each other find their way through a bureaucratic government organisation. It increasingly comes down to our ability to interactively steer ourselves.

## **Interactive self-steering**

In a world of growing polarisation, we are challenged to take control ourselves. How do we shape and give meaning to our own lives in dialogue with others? I call this interactive self-steering.

*Three qualities are essential for interactive self-steering.*

Firstly, the ability to set up meaningful processes for issues that concern us. This applies both at home and at work, as well as in our personal lives.

Secondly, learning to live in dialogue. We do not avoid others, we do not exclude others, but in dialogue with others we search together.

Thirdly, meaningful reflections. In a life full of action, reflection becomes increasingly important in order to maintain a meaningful balance between the extremes that beset us.

Together with my clients, I create a reflective space in which improvements are born through good dialogue. In a school, we develop a vision for the future on a Saturday and start a number of improvement processes. This gives the community fresh energy and makes a good future for this school possible.

How does that work? I ask the participants to consider three perspectives prior to the meeting. How do our clients, parents and children see us? How do the community and leadership function? What is the financial situation?

In groups, the participants share their findings and vision and write down meaningful sentences based on the dialogue. The groups present these sentences to each other. During the coffee break, a few colleagues get to work and return with an initial formulation. This is discussed again in the groups and anything that is missing can be added. Ultimately, this

guiding principle is lived and experienced for several months to see how it supports cooperation and decision-making. It is surprising how, in half a day, this community creates a guiding principle that is born from the souls of the participants. This guiding principle can be shared with stakeholders such as parents, supervisors and other interested parties. It also gives them an idea of what the supporting school community, leaders and teachers have in mind and want to achieve.

Such a guiding principle also gives rise to questions about what needs to be done to make this vision a reality. Issues in this school include: how to create a good dialogue with parents, how to get the finances in better order, and how to raise the standard of education for the pupils. A process owner is requested for each development process, namely the process owner who is trusted and has the capacity to bring this process to a successful conclusion.

Progress is monitored through regular exchanges between process owners and the community. Tips can help process owners find the right path. An important advantage of this approach is that it avoids endless discussion and allows concrete steps to be taken.

### **A helping hand**

We can have a special experience when we question the other person's issue in a way that encourages them to reflectively examine their own issue and then find their own next step. The other person formulates their issue. I ask questions, not to understand myself, but questions that help the other person to talk. "Give me an example", "How did that go recently", "What did you experience in that situation". As the other person talks, the issue starts to shift, it changes, it takes on new meaning and I also see new possibilities for dealing with the issue. This is not theory but an experience of mine and my colleagues' of how powerful and meaningful this dialogue is for people with questions.

One discovery in this regard was that in the operational organisation, where we are all busy working, there is no time or space for development. Development requires a different process than the one we practise in operations. In addition to daily routines and solving problems based on expertise, a third level is needed: the implementation of change and renewal processes in the organisation. I have published extensively on this subject. See: *Inside the Change* or *The Human Creation*. More articles and publications can be found at [www.het-imo.net](http://www.het-imo.net)

### **An example of interactive self-steering.**

For years, I trained consultants at SIOO context on how to guide change processes. I started with an exercise. Two participants were clients and two were consultants. The client has an issue, for example, the management team is not functioning properly. The client receives the consultants and begins to present the issue to them. The consultants listen and ask questions so that they can better understand the issue. The client then looks expectantly to see what the consultants have to offer. They offer training for the management team. "Please provide a quote for your offer, including what it will cost us". So far, so good.

I ask the client and consultants if they are satisfied with the meeting. They usually think it went well. I suggest a second meeting that will take a different approach. The consultants are

not trying to understand the issue, but are interested in how the client has worked on the issue so far. The client explains their issue and the consultants ask the client how they have worked on the issue so far. The client describes what they have done so far to advance the issue. Together with the advisers, the issue comes to life again in the client. The client appears. The advisers share some of their own experiences and insights and how this issue could be addressed. They engage in conversation and the client sees a process for dealing with the issue. They discuss a first step and make an appointment.

When it comes to change, the how and why are essential. Not only what the issue is, but also how we deal with it and why in that way. This reinforces the meaning of the event and reveals new paths we can take.

### **In conclusion**

Dealing with questions in an inspiring way together with others through interactive self-steering helps us to endure the pressure of institutionally organised life and to give meaning to our own actions. Wisdom in our actions can arise.