

SOCIETIES IN TRANSFORMATION

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Introduction

The world as a community is growing closer together every day with transformations in our social organizations and societies occurring at accelerated rates. Thus, the social changes presently in process are stimulating the integration of actions and results; integrations of human groupings; and socio-economic, cultural, political, technological integrations at fast paces unheard of in our recent history. These changes and transformations are a dynamic reality which, bringing peoples and countries closer together, also represent many challenges. The following reflections are written with the intent of sharing thoughts and experiences, and provoking exchanges. By learning from each other we are better able to utilize appropriate actions and realize achievements that are meaningful for the social organizations in which we interact. Thus, by helping each other avoid pitfalls already experienced, and by building upon shared experiences, we can effectively contribute to the dynamic changes now sweeping through our world community.

Overview

The experiences of other countries in terms of processes of reshaping society are useful in identifying similarities and differences, in learning how to respect a variety of processes of change and the ingredients of these changes,

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and building upon these for the benefit of our societies. The fast pace of the current socio-economic, political and technological changes is causing social organizations to adopt, for example, more:

- action-oriented approaches
- participation and collaboration
- quality—in relationships and products/services

Each of these areas has multiple implications for organizational life and for concerned professionals. Some of the more basic issues are: improving our social communications; recognizing the impact of current socio-economic and political changes on cultural and historical roots and expressions of society; the impact on our forms of working together; raising levels of consciousness and subsequent reactions-actions; impact on values, ethics, and beliefs. The multiple changes our organizations and countries are currently experiencing is forcing people to exercise more of their abilities in a compressed amount of time. This presents challenges for managers and social change agents to reach their goals efficiently, effectively and expeditiously.

We are currently facing the need for more *quality* in our working relationships and products/services, concurrent with an expanding market economy orientation which inherently means more competitive relations in the marketplace. The following schematic represents a process for achieving quality results that contribute toward marketplace competitiveness. While these are at the same time a methodological and technological process, they are also heavily dependent on human interrelationships.

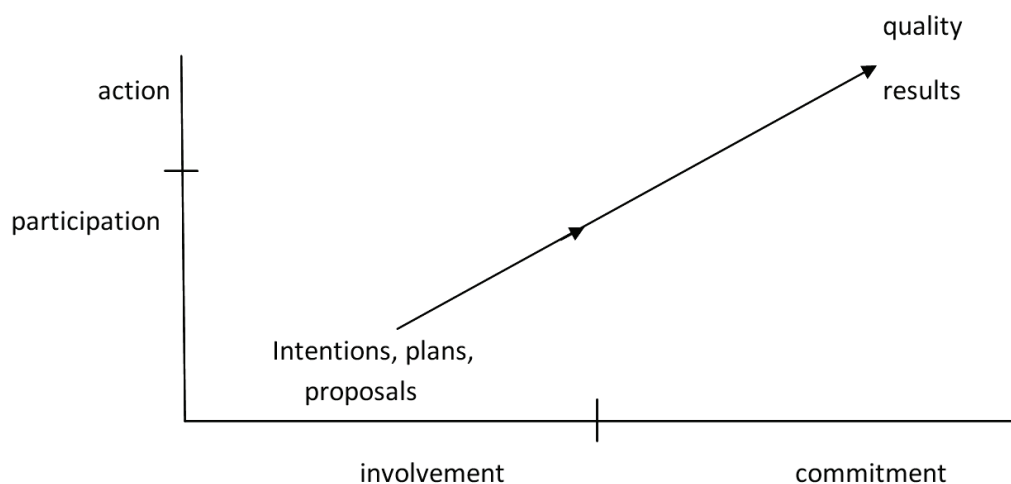


Diagram I indicates that people in social organizations go through a process of being “involved” and “participating” as part of the initial steps for reaching their goals. Achieving this initial level of interactions includes, for example, the formulation of plans, proposals and intentions. However, to get the plan “off the paper”, turning the intentions into reality, it is necessary to realize “actions” with “commitment”, thus producing the desired *quality results*. “Participation” with “commitment” does not guarantee results; it may, perhaps, achieve consciousness-raising, but not necessarily product or service. Likewise, “action” with “involvement” means that something perhaps gets done, but will not assure the sustained efforts necessary for reaching desired quality results which are resultants of the personal responsibility inherent in *commitments with action*.

This understanding of processes that people go through to reach “quality results” is useful for organizational relationships involved in the planning process, the production or creative process, the employee participation process. It enables organizations to achieve both a healthy working climate while increasing productivity and reaching their desired goals.

**Clients and client relationships:
attitudes and behaviors of serving others**

One of the most important, if not the most important, relationship that the organization has is with its clients. The client is the core of its business: without clients, there is NO business, there are no transactions. This is true both of the private sector and the public sector. The process of serving the client is critical to the success of organizations: *identifying* your client, *getting to know* your client, *establishing* and *maintaining* healthy relationships between client and your organization, and *delivering* the appropriate and necessary product. These are fundamental interactions for successful organizations. These same processes also apply to the internal client.

Public sector organizations rarely consider their external client — the general public (or special sectors of the general public) — as the primary objective of their work and their day-to-day operations. In fact, most public sector organizations never even consider client relationships, needs and issues as related to their “serving the client.” Entities working in the public sector generally focus on their *own internal* bureaucratic issues when discussing, analyzing and trying to improve their own systems. A somewhat more modern focus of public sector organizations is to strive to develop programs in work

redesign and simplification, staff training and development, systems and procedures streamlining, more efficient use of time (time management) and resources, and delivering faster and better services — all for the internal client. But rarely, do we encounter public organizations asking their external clients such fundamental questions as:

- “how can we better serve our client?”
- “who is/are our client(s)?”
- how can we satisfy and meet the needs of our client in a more efficient and effective manner?”

Most literature in public administration and public sector organizations focuses on “bureaucracies”, policy making, regulations, and rules-following. The actual inclusion of the “client” in the processes related to managing and productivity of public sector organizations is rare. Yet, the *raison d’être* of public sector organizations is to serve *the public*—that vast gamut of public life that ranges from infrastructure (electricity, water and sanitation, trash collection, road building and maintenance, telecommunications); to health (preventative and curative health, vaccination campaigns, sexuality and AIDS); education (public school systems, adult education, universities, special education, polytechnic centers); socio-cultural (the arts — graphic, visual, music, dance, cultural and historical patrimony); and other services, such as birth certificates, drivers’ licenses, passports, tax collection. As mentioned previously, we usually find educators and consultants in public sector organizations looking *only within* the organization to try to understand and improve the above services. The public sector organizations have traditionally focused on *survival* (vs. risk-taking in private sector), and on *maintenance and security* of their jobs and *benefits*. These have triggered attention to the complexities of bureaucratic behavior, power struggles, reorganizations to satisfy superficial or political demands—rarely is there prolonged analysis and organization actions directed toward serving the public.

Social change agents need to intensify their efforts to help change public sector organizations into client service-oriented organizations, truly serving the public and their well-being during this era of societal transformations. The bridging and building of new relationships between countries places an added dimension of responsibility on public sector organizations already perceived by the public as forever “complicating” public life — more forms to fill in, more signatures for approval, longer waits for services, more official stamps needed on documents, less quality and less quantity in service products available.

Let us change our view of the organization (public and private), starting with the organization chart, to try to better understand its interactive relationship with the total social environment. (See below, Diagram 2, New Form of Organization Chart)

Diagram 2. New Form of Organization Chart

POLICY MAKERS/EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS

MANAGERS

TECHNICAL-STAFF

CLIENT¹

The client-oriented focus for organizations in Diagram 2 will require profound changes in all aspects of organizing and working together, from conceptual changes to practical changes. But foremost, this change in perspective will require attitudinal and behavioral changes of persons within organizations to help ensure healthier and effective relationships among all “constituencies”² involved. This requires a thorough review and renewal of all aspects of working together and an appreciation for the dynamics of the interrelationships between all groupings within this new organization chart. Our review and renewal will include: more astuteness in identifying opportunities and clients, strategic planning, organizing and administering, selection and training, and forms and systems redesign. By providing an environment for work quality, the organization is fomenting greater sensitivity to others’ needs and concerns, intensified listening and receptivity, organizational communications, establishing mutual trust and respect, decentralization and responsibility centers, and dynamic feedback processes within the organization and for services rendered, and appropriate appraisals/processes.

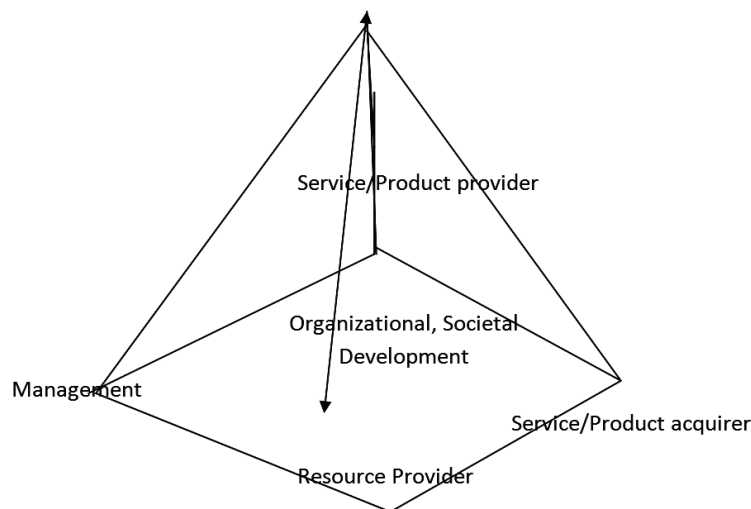
Also critical in our new approaches for improved and more enlightened relationships with clients is an analytical and operational look at what groups must be involved to ensure true organizational participation and quality results. Diagram 3, below, shows the four “generic” groups necessary and imperative

¹ Client: can be defined as any of all of those integrating the organizations internal and external environment — individuals, special groups, villages, community, town, municipality, state, nation.

² “Stakeholders” is now the more common usage.

for achieving participation in any organization (small/large, private/public), leading to organizational/societal development. The key is that all our groups **MUST** be involved, at minimum some portion of each group. The inter-relationships and contributions of each of these groups is critical for total development that is healthy and sustaining.

Diagram 3. Participatory Involvement — Action Commitment



Integration of Diagrams 2 and 3

Client = Service/Product acquirer

Technical/staff = Service/Product provider

Decision makers, negotiators, technology providers = Management

Policy makers/executive directors = Resource providers

Private sector organizations are also in the process of intensified changes as the world community grows closer. The reality of a 1992 European Common Market brings tremendous pressures on, and ramifications for, the private sector in every part of the world. It impacts on relationships of companies within the European community and it impacts on companies in other countries who will compete with, do business with, have to cope with/handle the results of this dramatic change in the world business environment.

One of the fundamental issues for success, and survival and growth in the private sector will be *client satisfaction with the product* and the total process

related to *servicing the client*. As the world grows closer in terms of relationships, information and technology exchanges, the resultant is a more sophisticated client in terms of needs, demands and tastes, and one who has a wider variety of choices in product purchasing options. The competitiveness of a company (of joint-ventures or groups of companies) will require new and creative measures in the areas of efficiency, effectiveness, quality of work, quality of relationships, diversification option, profits and profit-making, and decisions affecting the use of profits. Of particular interest is the use of profits in actions and programs related to social responsibility—of the company with its own personnel, with client organizations and with the public at large.

The brutal era of “anything goes” in order to win the contract or sell the product is almost over. Clients are looking for competitiveness and quality in all aspects of the business transaction — from initial contacts and identifying opportunities, to negotiating the contract, to creativity of services, to production and productive processes; including, humanizing relationships, product acceptance in the marketplace, and utilization of profits. In the past, competitiveness, often implied very aggressive initiatives to “get the contract”: maneuvers such as bribes, favors and gifts, or fierce cutting of product quality to meet only the minimum specifications of the contract. These aggressive tactics forced the workers to make super-human efforts to deliver the results because they were forced into limited timeframes for production, which caused their awareness that the trade-off was a decline in quality and a degeneration of relationships. The profits (whether immense or small) at the expense of client satisfaction and/or renewal of client relationships usually resulted in general consternation in the marketplace.

This past business scenario is changing and changing rapidly. Profit-oriented business transactions are very much a part of our everyday existence and profits continue being key factors in perpetuating the business. Companies require profits to survive and grow. What is occurring now is a revision of concepts and strategies and processes, with companies and the public asking more questions about, and taking actions related to, *how profits are generated and how profits are utilized*.

This review and renewal in thinking and actions of companies is also a reflection of the changing nature of client relationships. There are new synergies in these new ways of “working together.” Consultants and professionals working as social change agents should also understand that they are *both* an active part of the changing scenario as well as catalysts for those changes. One

of the critical changes in intra- and inter-organizational dynamics is the change to win-win positioning in establishing and maintaining relationships. This signifies that the product/service provider (both public and private sector) has new postures and processes in relating to the clients—they put much more effort into understanding the *needs* of the “service” receiver, understanding and promoting pro-active ways of interacting together, and reaching contractual agreements. These new attitudes and working relationships force the company/organization into understanding the *real* needs of the client, rather than imposing on clients what “they” know how to do and what “they” think is good for others (prescriptive). This new attitude requires studying and learning about the client, much discussion, and together passing through a process of reaching *consensus* in the decision-making process. All of these changes are part of the current trend toward *collaborative* relationships (win-win) within and between organizations and away from unhealthy competitive (win-lose, zero sum game) relationships. This change in client relationships is contributing toward a better quality of products and services, and at the same time promoting a more respectful and humanizing climate in the workplace and contributing towards more benefits for society in general.

These changes are also causing an impact on the concepts of and actions related to *entrepreneurship*. In the past, the entrepreneur was a one-of-a-kind individual. Today, the concepts and qualities of entrepreneurship are permeating all businesses—even public sector organizations are honoring “entrepreneurial” initiatives of staff. Thus, the traditional structures of strict hierarchy, control of communications and decisions, rigid adherence to complicated and tedious procedures—are all being questioned, reviewed and changed to enable organizations to interact more progressively in the marketplace.

Self-determination and creative thinking/actions are being stimulated and rewarded. The corporate manager and staff have the ability to plan and determine what they need to do, how to do it, and reach their goals in a decentralized and self-determined manner. The concepts of participatory management, throughout the whole of the organization, are gaining more and more importance and impact. Worker participation is becoming a more important aspect of corporate culture — sharing in the risk-taking and decision-making, thus stimulating greater involvement and commitment. This results in more effective and efficient workplaces, with shared responsibility and greater commitment of all workers in producing quality products and services for clients, and result in greater pride and satisfaction of the corporate workers and clients.

Other rapidly changing attitudes and processes within the private sector concern profits, quality of work life and competitiveness—as interconnected with greater worker participation. The traditional first steps toward worker participation in the organization has been through various schemes of profit sharing — from actual monetary rewards and bonuses to stock options, prevalent among them is the ESOP (Employee Stock Ownership Plan). The current trend goes far beyond these initial programs, having more profound and substantive effects on the work environment. Programs in quality of working life include: profit sharing, participation in planning and decision-making, actual/real responsibility for results (including cost control, risk-taking, product quality control, job satisfaction), decentralization, legitimate organizational “space” for creativity and innovative actions, concerns for the total work environment — including all aspects relating to work and family and community.

Social communication

We are all experiencing the “era” of rapidly improving and increasing communications. The context of social communication has two major considerations: *mass communications* and *informatics*. The arena of mass communications incorporates such processes as television, radio, video, posters, newspaper and magazines, street signs, slogans, telephone, fax, “soap operas”, community theater, communication with energies beyond our planet. How we transmit our message, i.e., the processes and medium we use, influences the “receiver” of the message and his subsequent decisions and actions. Although mass communications include the traditional visual and oral means of communication, the “developed” first world countries are also in a process of re-discovering historic roots of communication with spirits and *energies* that are beyond the boundaries of physical presence. We social scientists find ourselves working with all of these rapidly changing occurrences in world society and economies which affect our daily lives through this vast array of communication systems and processes. The importance for society and social scientists promoting social change of the area of mass communications (and the networks used for carrying and receiving messages) is the *rapidity* with which information is transmitted and received, and the way in which this information *impacts* upon and *influences* our lives, our decisions, and the manner in which we conduct our lives.

The second area of social communications that is increasingly influencing our lives is *informatics*. This word refers to the computer. . . lap-top — both personal and professional, main frame, electronic mail, etc. The ability to

communicate via computer has revolutionized written interactions, which can now be sent via modem and diskette—thus challenging the utility, performance and services of the mail system, for example.

What is the influence and importance of these social communications advances for social scientists? Of immediate concern is that they challenge, with rapidly changing technology, the communications processes and relationships which we have traditionally endeavored to improve within and among organizations. This causes several immediate organizational considerations — the management of information and the transparency and awareness caused by these changes. These changes do break up the concentration of power (previously limited) and they do democratize information. This system of exchange opens new areas of knowledge and actions—challenging our abilities to help our clients to integrate “all of this” into meaningful results. The rapidity of exchange among people, among organizations and among countries is more accelerated each day. This is therefore a major challenge to us and our skills to be able to utilize and provide assistance, in a constructive manner, in benefit of our client organizations and its members. We, as social change agents, need to develop the abilities to help provide quality and meaning in the communications as well as assist people in their skills and abilities for understanding and responding to these new communications realities. It challenges us because of the process of consciousness-raising of people (via these accelerated social communications processes) is reaching larger proportions each day. These new “realities” are causing profound impacts on our lives, our decision making, our choices, our plans—our future. The new communications opportunities also present challenges and bring to evidence: prejudices, stereotypes, socio-cultural and historical basis of social organizations, values and ethics in rapidly changing societies. These pose questioning of and challenges to the past, and its’ influence on the present and future.

Current trends

There is an increasing trend toward “privatization” of organizations, particularly of their assets, based on the market-oriented economy. Countries which had centralized economies, massive nationalization of commerce and industry, and large parastatal organizations have experienced poor results, managing to generate inefficiencies rather than reaching desired goals. Additionally, the active presence of the “informal sector” on national economies and its strong influence on the social structure, is forcing countries further

into debt and destabilizing the economy to points almost beyond the realm and abilities of managers to cope with/handle, resolve. The concurrent effects of both a growing trend towards privatization and the increase in informal sector are causing radical changes in the way we manage organizations, economic projections and productivity goals, and causing radical changes in what we produce (how and for whom) and services offered. Our dilemma is how to constructively help social organizations interact successfully in these changing times.

We find creative efforts occurring both in the public and private sectors to insure survival, growth and perpetuity of organizations. One of these efforts in the private sector is the promotion/stimulation of and support for micro-businesses and small-sized (and some medium-sized) industries—taking small, secure steps initially to build upon them as the organization develops. Incentives, such as fiscal and tax advantages, training and organization development, low interest loans are being used to stimulate more activity in the economy through economically productive activities, beginning with a smaller size and bringing more immediate socio-economic impact. As these micro- and small-sized businesses become effective and productive they are securing their presence in the marketplace. Their success establishes their active presence and thus facilitates expansion of their productive activities according to their abilities — based on continual successful results-based returns), marketplace demand and consumer satisfaction.

This approach—growth from micro- and small-sized organizations—is applicable for both the public and private sectors. An additional “gain” for public sector organizations of this approach (small first steps) is that it helps reestablish the public’s trust and confidence in them. Small and successful efforts in improving, simplifying and streamlining public services efficiently and effectively begins the process of public trust-building, thus establishing a stronger foundation upon which to build further public efforts, results and successes.

Another trend which is occurring with frequency in organizations is that of decentralization, accompanied by more active participation of workers in the life of the organization. Incumbent upon decentralized organizations is open and effective communications and streamlined communications systems, and support and encouragement in responsibility taking, at all levels of the organization and in all organizational processes and tasks. Leaders of decentralized organizations are responsible for stimulating and providing an environment of: openness and sharing of information, creative and innovative ideas-generating,

responsibility in decision making, risk taking, and problem solving. These leaders have the skill of agility — making things happen in a rapid and efficient/effective way. Leaders of decentralized organizations are also responsible for creating and maintaining synergy — with staff and workers/organization, with clients and partners, and with persons in other organization in the country (and world) where there are or could be relationships and transactions.

The current trends pulsating the world and bringing us closer require social scientists to be open to these changes, sensitive and capable of transforming these occurrences into meaningful understanding and actions/results. This also signifies perpetual self and professional renewal and active learning on the part of social scientists (with increasing attention to processes), so that the professional as a social change person, is also open to new approaches of working together. These demands for creative and innovative thinking and actions on our organizations and professionals who work in/with them will result in providing and helping organizational members and clients with the appropriate and meaningful solutions to their needs and future visions.