

Challenging Organisations and Society

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Involving Stakeholders to Develop Change Capacity for More Effective Collaboration and Continuous Change

Tonnie van der Zouwen

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TONNIE VAN DER ZOUWEN (NL)

Editor's Introduction: The Shift in Perception of Hierarchy and How to Provide Space for Shared Leadership

"All stakeholders are equal, but some are more equal than others."

(Marc Vermeulen¹)

A complex world requires strategic collaboration to achieve meaningful results and sustainable development. Involving a diversity of stakeholders, working together across boundaries of organisations and disciplines brings opportunities to look for new meanings and find common ground for future actions. The purpose of this issue is to support your understanding of the opportunities, dilemmas and paradoxes coming with involving stakeholders in processes for change and development. We invited authors to orientate on the following questions:

1. Inviting stakeholders implies sharing some power and knowledge. How do leaders and consultants perceive participative approaches and what helps them to make better use of available capacities of stakeholders?
2. What is known from theory and practice about a good match between the context of the issue at stake and the change strategy, i.e. when is a participative approach the right one, when is top-down better?

1 See the conclusion of the article '*Too Many Cooks Spoil the Broth*' by Marc Vermeulen in this issue, pp. 372–388.

3. How do participative change processes contribute to democracy? What are issues in the selection of stakeholders and the representation of groups? What makes a good stakeholder analysis?
4. Often a participative change process ends soon after the consultants/facilitators leave. What helps in a fast changing world to keep the participative change process going on?
5. What role can participative change processes play, such as Large Scale Interventions, in innovations regarding challenges of organizations and society?

In this issue

This issue presents seven articles with a rich diversity in perspectives and expertise. The abstraction level is ranging from a theoretical philosophical view on power relations and construction of meaning, from sociological and political developments in society regarding democracy and leadership, to lively stories of how things work out in practice, providing practical guidelines to overcome the caveats when involving stakeholders.

The first article describes how in Western society the stage was set for stakeholder involvement. In “*Socioperception and the Emergence of an Economy of Meaning. The Key Role of Socioperceptive People in Transforming Organisations and Society*”, Alain de Vulpian and Tonnie van der Zouwen, show the main lines in developments over centuries, regarding empathy and how people sense their sociological state (socioperception), the (need for the) shift from hierarchical leadership to more distributed leadership, and the emergence of a new social fabric for an economy of meaning. Socioperceptive leaders who see the advantages of sharing leadership develop empathy, and build up their capacity for collaboration to anticipate uncertain futures.

In “*The Little Engine that Could. How a Four People Unit Engages Stakeholders in Participatory Strategic Planning and Action – the Story and Its Lessons*”, Tova Averbuch gives an inspiring example of how socio-perceptive leaders (a leader can be a manager as well as a consultant or an employee with a leadership role) can put stakeholder involve-

ment into practice. She shows how using fears, combining traditional diagnosing techniques with dialogic OD results in strategic collaboration for renewal of identities, in an uncertain and complex situation.

Lucien van der Plaats sketches in his article “*Consigning Public Services to the People. Shifting from a Regulating to a Participating Government in the Netherlands*” how the shift in hierarchy perception works out for democratic governments. They develop from traditional public administration to new public management with citizen participation, to networked community governance. He takes the Dutch government as example, where some no longer speak of ‘participating citizens’ but of a ‘participating government’.

Stakeholder involvement implies sharing power. This brings paradoxes and dilemmas. “*Too Many Cooks Spoil the Broth. Stakeholder Management in 21st Century Non-Profit Organizations*” reflects on what happens when stakeholder involvement is uninvited and unwanted, with two illuminating cases. The author Marc Vermeulen concludes that stakeholder involvement is not for everything and everyone. To answer the question when to invite which stakeholders, he provides a matrix with guidelines for non-profit organisations.

Although stakeholder involvement and participative processes are gaining ground, the main stream in strategy making and consultancy is still top down, focussing on individuals, expecting heroic performance. How come? In “*Reflecting Power and Consultancy. From Supporting Heroism to Enabling Distributed Leadership*”, Peter Heintel and Tonnie van der Zouwen make a deep dive into philosophy and psychology regarding sharing power. They reflect on the role of consultants, the psychological barriers for sharing power, and the importance of building trust in the client-consultant relationship.

“*The Paradox of Programmed Dialogue in Large Group Interventions. A Social Constructionist Perspective*” brings another deep dive, now from a socio constructionist point of view. Antonie van Nistelrooij, Eva van der Fluit and Rob de Wilde deconstruct what dialogue between stakeholders is about. They signal the paradox of the open character of dialogue in a planned change process, such as a meeting with a

large group of stakeholders using a Large Group Intervention method. What can be done to compensate this paradox? How to deal with the voiceless stakeholders, often ‘those in need’?

Marvin Weisbord and Sandra Janoff provide in their article ‘*Ten Principles for Making Meetings Matter*’ guidelines for working with a diverse group of stakeholders on a basis of distributed leadership and self-management. Drawing on their long experience and experiments with Future Search as learning lab, they show how trust can be established and maintained. Since change derives from local action, they believe that society (and organisations) can only be constructively changed one meeting at a time. Because a meeting is a key forum where face-to-face dialogue is possible, enabling people to clarify their differences and discover common ground.

To conclude

The authors mention a shift in perception of hierarchy, shown in the desire of people to participate and collaborate. In society they see the power locus shifting from formal government and institutions to informal networks, where the interest of the people in society is becoming more important than the interest of the state. In organisations, attention shifts from individual performance towards collective performance. If we want to take the contributions of internal and external stakeholders seriously, the role of government, managers and consultants will change to being more a partner instead of a parent, with every partner having his own responsibility.

However, there is no single best role for government or management to play. Depending on the situation or issue, the formal leaders have their own responsibility for looking after the common interest. This means that leaders, consultants and other stakeholder groups have to be as clear as possible about the role they are ready, willing and able to play and what they expect from each other.

We hope this special issue on *Stakeholder Involvement* will stimulate your thinking about your own role as a reflective hybrid in the systems you work and live in. We thank the authors for their inspiring work, providing sources for new insights, conversations and tools for

addressing the growing desire of people to be actively involved in important issues.

On behalf of the Editorial Board,

Tonnie van der Zouwen

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Tova Averbuch has been an Organization Development practitioner for over thirty years. She pioneered with Open Space Technology (OST) in Israel and the world since 1999. She teaches Master degree students of Organizational Consultation in Recanati School for Business at Tel Aviv University, giving courses in consulting behavior and in Large Group Interventions with the whole system in the room. She carries a deep interest and unique style in hosting whole systems for meaningful conversations and for the emergence of collective new wisdom. For more information, visit

www.tovaaverbuch.com

Eva van der Fluit is management consultant with 30 years experience in a variety of consultancy roles and industries. She has worked in Europe, the US and Africa. She is an experienced program manager of change programs in the area of strategy, organizational design and culture-change. Her programs include small and large-scale interventions. She mostly works with professionals and combines her work with a PhD study on conflict handling. She does field research in the cockpit and focuses on the question how pilots handle potential conflict. Eva believes that effective change is the result of facilitating people to solve complex problems themselves and to develop their own organization.

www.evavanderfluit.nl

Peter Heintel is professor emeritus for philosophy and group dynamics at the University of Klagenfurt, Department of Intervention Research and Cultural Sustainability. His publications on philosophy of history, philosophy of science and history of science have been internationally recognized. Professor Heintel is well known for his research on time and is the founder of the “Society for Decelera-

tion of Time”. He has made numerous contributions to Process Ethics, Intervention Research, Cultural Sustainability, and Conflict Management. For more information and contact:

www.uni-klu.ac.at/iff/ikn/inhalt/1.htm, peter.heintel@aau.at.

Sandra Janoff, PhD is a consultant and psychologist, co-recipient of the Organization Development Network’s 2011 Outstanding Global Work Award for the Future Search Network and a member of the European Institute for Transnational Studies. Sandra’s work has taken her to every continent working on issues of globalization, sustainability, economic renewal and humane practice in Africa, Asia, Australia, West and East Europe and New Zealand. She was a staff member in Tavistock conferences sponsored by Temple University in Philadelphia and The Tavistock Institute of Human Relations in London, England. She is co-author with Yvonne Agazarian of “Systems Thinking and Small Groups” for the Comprehensive Textbook of Group Psychotherapy.

sjanoff@futuresearch.net and
www.futuresearch.net

Antonie van Nistelrooij is management consultant for all types of clients in government and industry and Assistant Professor of ‘Organizational Change & Development’ at the VU University of Amsterdam in the Netherlands. His research focuses on challenges in facilitating participative organizational change. This has resulted in several scientific books and articles on subjects like ‘Change Leadership’, ‘Large Group Interventions’ and ‘Change Management’. Most of his publications are embedded in a social constructionist perspective on change. He is editor of the Journal of Change Management and works as a lecturer and academic supervisor for several MBA’s, in company programs and postgraduate programs at several Dutch universities.

Lucien van der Plaats has been an interim communications manager and consultant for fourteen years. Predominantly in Dutch local and regional (semi-) governmental institutions, Lucien coaches and advises PR professionals, managers, directors and policy makers in their communication activities during change projects or policy projects and programs. He is also a facilitator of Large Scale Intervention Events (i.a. Open Space, Worldcafé). His main fields of interest are citizen participation, co-creation and communicating organizational change. Lucien lectures and writes blogs on co-creation, serious gaming (gamification as a means to involve people in change processes) and corporate storytelling. He holds a master's degree in European Public Relations.

Marc Vermeulen is professor of educational sociology at Tilburg University and at the Open University NL and he teaches strategic analysis for public organizations at TiasNimbas Business School in the Netherlands. He is academic director of the Strategy, Innovation and Governance course for top managers in education. He is also a consultant for leaders of public organizations and member of the Supervisory Council for several social enterprises.

Alain de Vulpian is a socio-anthropologist and the founder of Cofremca, RISC, and Sociovision. He has dedicated his professional life to conducting action research, observing the evolution of western societies, and designing humane interventions. His book "Towards the Third Modernity: How Ordinary People Are Transforming the World", Triarchy Press, 2008, summarizes this work. Since his retirement, Alain has continued to research topics of general interest. He is vice president of SoL France.

Marvin Weisbord is a distinguished Visiting Scholar of Organizational Dynamics Graduate Studies at the University of Pennsylvania, a Distinguished Visiting Fellow at Ashridge Business School (UK) and

a fellow of the World Academy of Productivity Science. During 50 years as a manager, consultant, researcher and teacher he has worked with businesses, NGOs, and medical schools. He has been a partner in the consulting firm Block Petrella Weisbord and a member of NTL Institute and the European Institute for Transnational Studies for more than 20 years. He has a Lifetime Achievement award from the Organization Development Network, which voted “Productive Workplaces” one of the most influential books of the past 40 years. The 3rd edition in 2012 was chosen Best Business Book on Organizational Culture by *strategy+business* magazine.

mweisbord@futuresearch.net and www.futuresearch.net

Rob de Wilde Msc works as management consultant, interim (change) manager and teaches at several Dutch business schools. He is specialized in Large Scale Interventions and leadership development and is one of the pioneers in introducing Large Scale Intervention and Whole Scale Change in the Netherlands, after he had been invited by the founders of Whole Scale Change and Real Time Strategic Change in the early nineties. He is (co)author of several books on this topic and wrote about thirty articles.

www.sigma-rt.nl

Tonnie van der Zouwen studied Ecology and Change Management in the Netherlands. After a career as researcher, teacher, environmental consultant and organizational consultant she now works as an independent organizational consultant. She guides organizations and networks in developing their change capacities. She does this by introducing interactive change methods, bringing people together beyond the boundaries of organizations and disciplines. She writes informative handbooks and articles on these methods and educates professionals on how to apply them. She wrote a doctoral thesis on a framework for effectiveness an evaluation of sustainable change with Large Scale Interventions. For further information and contact see

www.tonnievanderzouwen.com and www.largescaleinterventions.com

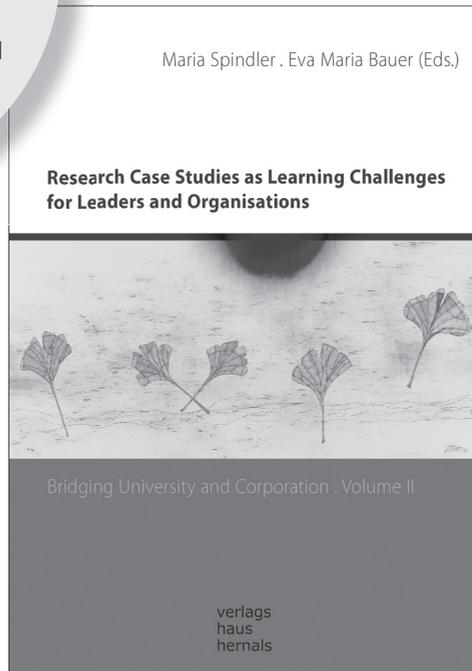
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