

vertical to horizontal: a new workplace reality

Following on from his article [no-one to command & control: a new paradigm for a new reality](#) Rune Olsen explores the our assumption that hierarchy is the "natural" way of structuring an organization and considers how "flatter" alternatives respect the dignity and autonomy of individual employees.

Contemporary organizations have tended to organize the workplace in a vertical and hierarchical manner, as though this arrangement is the only natural way of getting things done. This vertically oriented reality is based on a belief in domination, command and control, and has provided a powerful source of validation for hierarchical relationships in organizational life.

The source of control generally resides in some external authority that dominates and exerts control over the person by virtue of rank and position. It is usually power exercised by one person over another, where the subordinate is coerced into following the decisions made by the person in charge.

As Markus Reihlen¹ says: "One major characteristic of hierarchical governing systems is the general decision power a person receives from his or her position in the hierarchy regardless of the expertise the person possesses for solving a given problem." One may add that the higher up in the organization's layers we get, the more power (the authority to make decisions based on position and rank) we find and the less competence (problem solving ability) we find. This is because decisions made in the higher levels of the organization are made on the basis of a fair number of assumptions, presumptions and notions, and not so much on the basis of actual knowledge of the matter at hand. The lower down in the organizational layers we get, the less power and the more competence we find. This is because decision-making power is concentrated in the higher levels. Competence at the lower levels, however, is based on personal knowledge and experiences caused by the short distance between the people at the bottom and the daily reality of their work and lives.

In recent decades the extent and range of human competence (knowledge, skills, abilities, capabilities) in the workplace has grown rapidly. Today's workforce has knowledge and abilities that we would have assumed inconceivable just 20-30 years ago. From a logical perspective, we should expect that because of this knowledge revolution, organizational life would have adapted to this development in human competence. We would have good reason to anticipate that the need for command and control of workers would have been reduced in proportion to this explosion in knowledge and in *intellectual capital*. Furthermore we would also have reason to expect that the need to encourage and generate personal freedom from control would have accelerated at an equivalent rate.

In fact, we have witnessed quite the opposite. It seems that the workplace is being organized as if people know less and less, in spite of the fact that people know more and more. Therefore we have witnessed an expansion in controlling systems in the workplace, and a corresponding diminution in personal freedom from control. This state of affairs is paradoxical with regard to the relationship between how things are getting done at work (as regular and usual) and the growth that has taken place in human competence and capabilities at the same time. Instead of investing in the liberation of people from systems of command and control, organizations have been investing in reinforcing and tightening the hierarchical order, with the help of more advanced and sophisticated systems of command and control.

Hierarchies are, by their very nature, systems of domination, command and control. They are essentially systems and structures of institutionalized domination. They place people in ranks of superiors and inferiors. Positioning some people above others activates particular 'drives' or responses and *steering mechanisms* to arrange and legitimize someone's control over others.

Researchers have noted that whenever control, coercion, use of submission and domination in the name of rank and position occurs, hostile and destructive forms of interpersonal relationships emerge. David Kipnis² concludes that when people are given the opportunity to control others (because of the built-in controlling mechanisms in vertical structures) they will tend to do so with the intention of both legitimizing their own roles and functions as superiors and maintaining their base as power-holders. Kipnis suggests that power seems to unleash in most people the tendency to manipulate others. Such abusive tendencies emerge even if people do not believe that these tendencies existed inside themselves before power over others was bestowed on them.

By placing people in legitimized positions of formal authority over others, hierarchical power systems tend to bring out abusive characteristics in people.

How did domination, control and commanding mechanisms emerge? How did these authority features become so deeply embedded in our belief-systems, in mass-consciousness, in human societies and in our organizations? How did people start to view life as a vertical reality and consequently lead human beings to relate to one another in a dominating, controlling, and commanding manner as superiors and inferiors?

We have, for example, used language to cover up this unequal treatment of fellow human beings in the sense that we have replaced 'uncomfortable' terms like command and control with more acceptable words such as influence and leadership. However, the essence remains. Vertical order in our society and hierarchical power structures in our workplaces have been a reality for centuries and are our reality now.

This seems to happen because they are viewed as sacred or a natural order in which to arrange relations between people. Formal authorities in our societies and in our organizations are given the authority to exercise control over their subordinates in the name of this hierarchical order. This has promoted the development of 'primitive' dispositions in the workplace through the authorization of people in charge. The belief that not everyone is able to take responsibility for his or her own actions in the workplace is an excuse to take control over others.

The consequences of hierarchical systems in organizational life are the destruction of human dignity and personal freedom. The creative contributions of people in the vertical order are disallowed because of the mechanisms that are built into vertical ranking in the workplace.

Regaining control over our own lives and our own situations in the workplace will require some fundamental alterations in our belief systems. It will require the transformation from a hierarchical reality in the workplace to an egalitarian one. Such change will mean a shift from a belief system of domination, controlling and commanding others, to a belief system of personal freedom and mutual trust. In this context, the term "egalitarian" means relating to each other as fellow human beings, as equals, as peers, as individuals who deserve respect because of our nature as unique individual human beings who have the capability and ability to take responsibility for our own actions.

The origin of the vertical organization and hierarchical power structure

Wendell Krossa³ says: "Our contemporary forms of hierarchy originate with the predatory domination of our animal past. The vertical form of relating has continued on through the various stages of human evolution, from primate to hunter/gather, and then into the institutions of early human domesticated

society, and thereby into the present." Hierarchical relating is ultimately an ancient expression of animal nature and animal behaviour. The vertical relationships of hierarchy express quite simply the ancient drive of competition for resources and the domination required for survival in a competitive animal environment.

The core element according to Krossa is that the hierarchical arrangement of relationships in human societies is simply a refinement of versions of animal-like systems of domination. Hierarchical organizations are quite simply a formalization of animal social structures implemented in human institutions. The belief systems of vertically orientated realities made it likely that people would create structures and institutions based on the only reality that they were aware of - the vertical relationships of domination. Early institutions, with their dominant/subordinate and superior/inferior patterns of organizing, became the main system for all subsequent forms of human relations. Krossa continues: "We are now human and there is no excuse to continue acting like animals. If we are ever going to remove the destructive element of control from human relating then we need to understand that institutionalized vertical forms of relating are a serious hindrance to human progress." Krossa points out further: "There has been little effort to distinguish the fact that while animal evolution selected certain traits such as competitiveness and domination for its ongoing existence, the emergence of modern human consciousness is leading humanity in an entirely new direction away from competition and domination and toward co-operation, equality and freedom." But when we study the reality in our contemporary organizations, we find to the contrary that the path from competition towards co-operation is still obstructed by the nature of the power structure in modern organizations.

Krossa states further, "The key point to remember is that a vertical orientation expresses animal-like domination and control, while horizontal relating serves to describe non-controlling co-operation and the free interactions of true equals." What inspires the formation of vertical relationships or hierarchies is the instinct or drive for advantage over others. In this struggle for ongoing existence those who cannot dominate by brute force are coerced into submission. Animal relating has become deeply entrenched in human ideologies, social orders and institutions. As developing human beings we are becoming more conscious of the nature of humanity as free, inclusive, and egalitarian, but we still exist within controlling organizations. We continue to exist within primitive structures that orient us toward the drives of our animal past.

The main inspiration behind hierarchies is the drive for advantage over others by control and through command. This disposition assumes competition for power and the struggle for command and control as natural and normal, and is regarded as the only way we can get things done in our organizations. On the other hand this disposition towards vertical commanding structures makes collaboration, co-operation and mutual understanding between people impossible.

If all employees had access to equal possibilities and opportunities and were appreciated and acknowledged for their competence and their knowledge, skills and experience relevant to the operation of the organization, there would be no rational basis for hierarchical authority. The system of control - the main mechanism of hierarchical authority - offers security, certainty and predictability at the cost of the loss of freedom to become a truly human being.

Hierarchical relationships demand unquestioning submission and obedience. The relationship between "command and obey" and between "control and submit", is very important in relation to how we get things done in our modern working life.

The myth and reality of human relationships

What does it mean to be human? It is simply freedom from control. The competitive pursuit of personal survival and personal advancement is quite the opposite driving mechanism. Therefore there is a fundamental difference between animal mentality as competitive, and human mentality as co-operative. The urge towards co-operation is the factor that makes us human and it is the primary mechanism that forms human relations. Competition on the other hand is the factor that makes us non-

human and creates non-human relations. Freedom from control and domination requires an inter-human relating in horizontal relationships with others.

Horizontal equality (an egalitarian power structure) encourages us to:

1. Challenge control
2. Resist domination
3. Exercise choice
4. Question authority
5. Refuse command

The core of horizontal organizing is a relationship based upon free and responsible equals with no outside elements of control, command and domination.

Personal freedom is encumbered with uncertainty which is frightening to people long used to the supposed security that emanated from a commanded and controlled existence. So, ignoring the possibility and opportunity to be free, many people find it safer to retreat into the security of a hierarchical existence.

Freedom means responsibility to make choices and to live with the consequences of those choices. It can appear at first more secure to be handing over to others' responsibility, rather than risking the uncertainty in making our own choices. This retreat, however, is a denial of our essence as human beings and a choice to move into the animal-like existence of a commanded creature. The primitive desire to be controlled can to a certain degree explain the willingness of people to be led by others. But this disposition is not a human trait and not at all an ingredient in a human relationship, but instead an animal-like instinct to fall into the way of being controlled by authorities.

Such subservience to leadership alleviates the fear of insecurity that accompanies true freedom, and undermines the personal responsibility that is essential to human development. To make choices is, in its essence, insecure and unpredictable. But freedom is actually about making free decisions. Responsibility is about making decisions and taking the consequences. If we resist freedom and want to avoid the consequences of freedom, we at the same time do not accept the responsibilities that are embedded in the nature of freedom. Then we also deny our ability to act as responsible human beings.

Jack Zwemer⁴ has said: "In a truly human existence, control of choice and behaviour must never originate from outside of the self because external control effectively destroys the essential function of the human self as a responsible entity."

The hierarchical relationship between dominate/subordinate, superior/inferior, boss/worker, leader/follower reflects the perverse human drive for prestige, status and power over others. Rights and privileges are apportioned according to one's rank and position through the hierarchical order.

Loyalty with or without compassion

In human relating we find mainly two types of loyalty:

1. Singular loyalty: Coercive volunteering (forced loyalty). Connection to an external authority who is in charge and has the power to make decisions over others below. In a vertical structure it is a compulsory tool to force employees into conformity, rigidity, uniformity through pledging their loyalty to the masters. The demand of loyalty is part of the effort to control people and keep them subservient to the hierarchical order.
2. Mutual loyalty: Chosen volunteering (self-elected loyalty). Connection with personal responsibility for oneself and others in mutual trust, understanding and respect for individual diversity.

People show loyalty to decisions over which they have influence and control. People will especially support the outcomes of processes if they feel that the outcome is genuinely the result of their own decision making and has not been handed down to them from superiors.

Jack Zwemer has said that, "true compassion is only possible between persons on the same level". It is not possible to have true compassion up or down to others. To fully realize true self-hood people must relate to each other equally. Personality and individuality cannot develop in a relationship between a subordinate and a superior person. Each must be capable of the same possibilities and opportunities for choices and decisions. The relationship must be committed to human equality. You cannot command compassion or commitment. The self must be free to co-operate or not co-operate. External control exercised over the human self will destroy the very nature of the self in its relationship with others.

Free people tend to commit to co-operate as equals when they are treated as equals. Then they must have equal access whenever they choose to operate as free individuals. Freedom from outside control and freedom for personal control is the essential factor for becoming and being a human individual.

Vertically oriented power is corrupting and depraving in regards to human consciousness. Kipnis states that outer control of power in any relationship will corrupt the attitude of the person holding the dominant position. Externalized power changes the perception of the people in charge and their perception of others. Externalized power gives the one in charge a perception of those below as less worthy of freedom and trust, and legitimizes manipulation in a commanding and condescending manner. The powerful perceives the powerless more as productive objects and less as individuals and human beings.

Krossa says, " There are no such things as nice bosses. Control is by its essence damaging and destroying to self-awareness, self-esteem and self-respect whether or not the boss is nice or bad." The hierarchical system is there anyway with its controlling and commanding mechanisms. People who are treated as genuine equals feel more secure about expressing themselves as individuals and feel less obliged to perform in standardized ways according to organizational rules and regulations.

Tokenism as a way to create myths in justifying control and command

Tokenism is the way managers create an illusion of trying to humanize the workplace. **Andrew Oldenquist**⁵ has done research on the reform efforts of corporations for improving work-results. He states that, "Corporations are seemingly interested in improving the quality of working life, but (in reality) this is pursued only to the extent that it serves management and corporate goals - maximizing profit, improving efficiency and raising productivity." These token efforts are often only disguised manipulation, and serve only to create further resentment and resistance from those at the bottom. These efforts as alternative ways to organize the workplace end up promoting the same old vertical structures, which do not create real participation and self-control, except in a token way. Oldenquist says further: "Authority is still distributed hierarchically with decision making power concentrated at the top of structures. This leaves the majority at the bottom powerless." This is not in any way about freedom, but simply a form of modern slavery.

We do not get control from others. We take control by ourselves whenever we get control. If we are given control by others, we are only manipulated to believe that we have control as a token effort of participation. Control is something we achieve in gaining personal responsibility. **Ellen Langer**⁶ says: "Control is essential to human functioning and if people are given a sense of being in control of their lives, then this sense of control can bring clear mental and physical improvement to them." She also states that instead of giving people decisions to make, we should encourage decision-making as an ongoing process for development of self-esteem and mutual trust. It is therefore important to realize that personally taking initiative and exerting control has more impact than when control is given by another. Giving control implies that the person giving still has control and can withdraw it according to Langer.

Langer further says that "people must not be given control as though it were an object to be given and taken back". People must instead learn to take personal control as an evolving process of learning personal decision-making. Giving or delegating authority creates a superior/inferior relationship between the people involved. One person is the dominator who controls a resource to be delegated to another person below. Our authority as givers automatically grants us power over others who do not have the same access to the resources. Therefore, this practice of giving - as a form of domination and main threat in the hierarchical organization - is always encumbered with the feeling of humiliation from the receiver's point of view. Being an object of delegation and a recipient of giving (as a token of shared power), a person can naturally feel the humiliating bitterness engendered by being a powerless and subservient receiver of the mercy from the benefactor.

Managers control power, which they may choose to give or to share with their subordinates, but only if this does not detract from their own authority or ability to exercise power. The most obvious flaw in the context of power concentration in the hands of managers is that it assumes that power is a commodity that can be shared among individuals or groups. This presumes the hierarchical power base in organizations so that power can be kept in the hands of the givers. Giving, delegating or sharing power in a hierarchical structure is a way of pretending that people will be empowered by the manager's goodwill. This is a deception in the sense that managers are not actually entitled to give away any power because their power is connected to their position and rank. Therefore the manager's power cannot be given away as some personal gift or commodity, because this power is an integral part of their job and occupational status. If they still give some of their power away, managers will undermine their role as superiors and encounter problems with their own authority in exercising their power to control other persons.

The consequences of humiliation in the workplace

The humiliation and desperation that arises from loss of control over a person's work situation can lead to tragic results. When people are not allowed to express themselves to a superior because of fear of losing their job, people can suffer illness and other damage. The human being is expected to suppress his or her personal feelings and needs, as a production factor in the organization's economic self-interest. Therefore, upper hierarchical positions demand the type of people who are callous, aggressive and cynical in their treatment of others. These traits are believed to be necessary in order to coerce subordinate people to function efficiently according to the organization's standards, norms and values. If people do not obey and submit to these management standards, they can be, according to the standards, rules and regulations, "justly" exposed to punishment and sanctions.

The desire to climb over others, to compete and to win over others is described as being ambitious and is a main value in a hierarchical organizational structure. This behaviour is rewarded by promotion. This climbing does not concern the conscience of the organization, even if the climbing over others seriously dehumanizes and damages both the passed-over person and the climber as a person.

When callous individuals aggressively climb the organizational ladder to gain personal advantage, power and control at the expense of others without any concern or conscience at all, they are - through their promotion - taking part in the shaping of organizational practices and standards. This "vertical flow" movement up the hierarchy then forms a type of institutionalized psychopathy. Contemporary economic ideology justifies this practice of competition in the self-interest of man in the hierarchical organization.

To get rid of these suppressive and oppressive forces, we must reach down to the root cause of the control and domination patterns in work-life. Just changing the term "competition" to "co-operation", without making fundamental changes in the power structure, does not change the essence of these relationships. These terms do not remove the existential fact that as long as someone exercises control over others, then we will never get collaboration and co-operation with its essential equal access and

equal influence over the decision-making process. As Krossa says: "Denying shared power over decision making processes that affect people, violates people's sense of equality and freedom and therefore violates the basic humanity of all involved in a process or organization."

The myth of efficiency

Competition is the driving mechanism in hierarchical relating. The ideology of efficiency has been developed to support competitive hierarchical dominance. This ideology urges efficiency as the supreme value, taking precedence over all other organizational values, including human values. Efficiency is used to validate and measure all types of hierarchical arrangements. Efficiency as a central element in human enterprises reflects a one-sided drive to meet only material needs and goals. Our vertical structures embrace values based on competition between human beings, with the result that someone must win and someone must lose. Therefore, efficiency encourages values that are contradictory to co-operative human relationships.

The myth and reality of participation

George Benello⁷ says that workers are motivated to participate in the control of their workplace and will develop personal responsibility when the opportunities exist. Enhanced participation increases worker satisfaction and commitment to their work. He says: "There is a circular reinforcing process so that as competence is increased, greater confidence develops. This leads to a greater willingness to exercise personal control, leading in turn to increased competence. Just as the inability to make decisions breeds lack of confidence, so the opportunity to participate increases confidence." The tokenism of sharing power and inviting employees to participate is creating a reluctance to join these participative processes. People are seeing through the delusion of participation while under the charge of others.

The difference between *pretended participation* and *real participation* is fundamental for motivating people to join up and get their full support and dedication to the process. When people experience pretended participation they will classify it as coercive, and the result can be a blocking and sabotage of organizational action. The real participation process is just about voluntary joint efforts between equals on the same ground, sharing power to get the job done. Real participation will build mutual trust between people in their individual ability to take responsibility for their separate tasks and functions. Only through this type of participation will creativity flow as it unleashes individual capabilities and the willpower to do one's best and to help each other to do their best in getting the job done. When, on the other hand, the organization is preoccupied with getting the job done by motivating people to do the job better than others (and not helping each other), this attitude will destroy real participation and undermine personal responsibility and creativity.

Organizations experience inefficiency and deterioration when people resent and resist participation, but still put the blame for disappointing results on people's behaviour and not the organization's own attitudes, values and practices. The organizational problem and paradox will inevitably strengthen organizational behaviour around one version or standard as a cause of the deteriorated results, which in the next round will demand further effective control through conformity and subservience for those involved. Organizational features and patterns are therefore frozen into ingrained organizational structures and fixed procedures.

Joyce Rothschild⁸ says: "Where people do not have participatory habits, it is because they have not generally been allowed any substantial control over important decisions." The power-holders dread the loss of control over others and devise numerous excuses for refusing to share power. The main excuse for implementing control devices is that people can be stupid and lazy and lack a sense of co-operation. Furthermore, people are said to be unable to take responsibility for their own actions. The managerial systems of control are therefore in place to provide for the unforeseen and unpredictable consequences of the actions of ordinary people.

The lack of real participation in the workplace leads to a lack of implementation of decisions, because the people that are needed for the implementation of decisions do not feel themselves a part of the decision making process. When pretended participation is put into action, people will feel that they are forced to participate and will do so in a resisting way. As Kipnis says: "The use of even moderate power in persuading employees to join a decision process, stimulates opposition."

Snyder and Fromkin⁹ say that most contemporary organizations tend towards an operating practice in which they destroy the uniqueness of people. They add: "On entering organizations people are shaped into an object that fits the institution, to assist in the smooth running of routine operations." Employees are forced to fit their behaviour to match some standardized general profile. This is achieved through conformity to rules. Any deviation from the organizational standard of behaviour is dealt with by disciplinary action. With the loss of individuality, there is a loss of creativity, which is the price organizations are willing to pay for conformity to rules and regulations.

The myth of management development

Management development programmes are presumed to create greater involvement and participation in the workplace. As we have talked about earlier in this paper these efforts are often ways to disguise the need for more advanced and sophisticated forms of controlling people in their workplace. The difference between what management programmes pretend and what they really intend are substantial. Take empowerment programmes. They pretend as follows:

1. Delegation of responsibility from management to employees.
2. No-hierarchical forms of work organization.
3. Sharing of information between and within different levels of organization.

The specific workplace-mechanism through which these pretensions shall be realised are:

1. Autonomous work-groups (teams)
2. Decentralised information systems

Different research studies have shown that these measures represent relatively marginal modifications to dominant, pre-existing, organizational forms and practices. Cunningham *et al.*¹⁰ found in British studies that "empowerment fails to give employees much in the way of increased power and influence." Warhurst and Thompson¹¹ conclude from their workplace studies that: "The hollow laugh received when mentioning the word 'empowerment' in most organizations is the true test that employees at many levels experience this great 'innovation' less as the opportunity to exercise extra discretion, and more as the necessity to undertake more tasks." Bill Harley¹² says that: "Employees who work in workplaces with any of the empowerment mechanisms in place do not report any difference in their level of autonomy from employees who work in workplaces without the mechanisms". This is a very significant finding. It is consistent with the claim that practices allegedly associated with empowerment do not contribute to employee autonomy. Harley continues, "Being a member of a management group is positively associated with autonomy, while being a member of other groups tends to be negatively associated". Finally, he arrives at the following conclusion: "The relative capacity of individuals or groups to exert control over production is determined primarily by virtue of their respective positions within organizational hierarchies. Positions within hierarchies are defined in terms of their relationship to other positions. Managers are managers by virtue of their positions within hierarchies, which affords them the capacity to exercise power over their subordinates. Unless hierarchy disappears, it is extraordinary unlikely that we will witness a generalised shift in control from managers to employee." It is this fact of organizational life that provides the most compelling explanation of why empowerment does not empower workers.

The use of work-groups as a way of developing the workplace in a more autonomous direction can backfire in the sense that group pressure can create another form of conformity and servility. Markus Reihlen states this paradox in his research: "The group-think effect emerges in strong coherent groups

where group members attempt to realize unanimity, consensus, and harmony of their efforts. At the same time, the ability for creative thought and rational judgement is negatively affected by group pressure". Reihlen concludes, "Excessive cultural control leads to the elimination of the pluralistic character and deprives the organization of its innovative abilities. Moreover, the organization will degenerate into a belief system sacrificing its creative potential to a uniform dogma." Louis Zurcher¹³ notes that individuals easily define themselves in terms of an organizational group in which they are included. He says: "The individual tends toward rigid adherence to conventional values; submissive, uncritical attitudes toward idealized moral authorities in the group, tendency to look for and punish people who violate conventional values, opposition to the subjective, imaginative or tender minded, tendency to think in rigid categories, preoccupation with dominance/submission, strong/weak, leader/follower categories."

Wendell Krossa argues that, "We are in need of new structures for human organizing that will support new co-operative forms of human relating - truly egalitarian forms of relating". Max Weber¹⁴ developed a contrary ideology in this respect. Weber's belief in an organizational system (bureaucratic) regulated by rules, led him to accept domination as legitimate and necessary, as an administrative structure to execute command and control. Weber developed his thoughts about organizations over a century ago. Fredrik Taylor¹⁵ applied these thoughts through his theory of Scientific Management in the beginning of the 20th century. But the ideas and visions of these pioneers in the history of organizations still flourish after almost 100 years. And that is a paradox when we know that everything in working life has changed character during the last century, aside from the organizational structure in the workplace. Therefore we can say, using Krossa's words, "We, as developing human beings, are becoming more conscious of the nature of humanity as free, inclusive and egalitarian, but we still exist within controlling organizations. We continue to exist within primitive structures that orient us to the drives of our animal past." Wanda Marie Pasz¹⁶ adds to this evolutionary perspective: "When it comes to the tools, methods and processes we use to get work done, we're light years ahead of our predecessors but when it comes to the values, the principles that form the basis of our relationships to and at work, we're stuck in the past - the deep, dark past."

As for management decision-making processes, subordinated people are needed to take part in the implementation of decisions of their superiors because of their roles as operators in this phase of the process. However they are often excluded from the decision making itself because they are not entitled to the authority to participate in this phase of the process because of their role as subordinates. Therefore the first phase - when the decisions are made - can be defined as *informing*, and the second phase - when decisions are being put into action - can be defined as *involving*. But employees can nevertheless be characterized as *participants* whether they are just informed about decisions that are made (as receivers), or as operators who are involved in the implementing of the decision (as executors). In any case employees are commanded and instructed to do so. So the term *participation* relates to a management practice that deals with control over the decision making process, and the power to determinate whether or when subordinate people shall be excluded or included in the process. Used in this context, the term participation refers to a management method (grounded on a vertical structure), and not to anything mutual and reciprocal (grounded on a horizontal structure between equals). As Bernhard and Glanz¹⁷ suggest, attempts at developing organizations often give the illusion of participation, but come down to a management trick to make people work harder.

Management development is mainly focused on developing skills for competition, to be best all time, to attain the best advantage in competing with others, to succeed as winners and not be losers, to encourage promotions at the expense of others. In others words beating opponents and struggling to win the match at any cost through competition is the mantra of management development. Competition consists of two contrary elements. The constructive one is that it can mobilise untapped resources inside the human being. But when these potential resources are released and unpacked in a management process, they cause severe damage to relationships between the people involved. The winners' resources are being stimulated and appreciated, while the losers' resources are looked upon as uncompetitive and unworthy of appreciation. In competition, the winners emerge as superiors, and the losers are relegated to subordinate status. And this diversification in rank, position, status and

prestige, naturally undermines relationships between people as equals and destroys their ability to communicate and co-operate. Our ability to communicate and co-operate is determined by our degree of equality. This is because people must be on the same and horizontal level to be able to grant each other equal rights of personal freedom and mutual trust, and in that sense to be capable of communicating and co-operating with each other.

To develop contesting and competing skills (even if the official purpose is to develop communicative and co-operative skills) managers attend training seminars in an effort to become better leaders. The vain hope is that a management training programme will result in improved employee relationships and improved organizational performance. This effort is, as we have argued earlier, an exercise in futility for the company. Much research documents the lack of improved profitability for the organization as a consequence of management training programmes. Such programmes include a small minority of people in the organization because of their superior ranks and positions, and exclude a vast majority of people grounded by their status as subordinates. These types of training programmes are, therefore, only token measures. Such tokenism insults the people who are left outside as just another form of manipulation and control. Such management tools are understood by subordinates as nothing more than a means to dominate and control the many. This type of management practice is therefore viewed as a tactic for securing benefits for the few at the further expense of the many.

What then are the alternatives to management development in organizational life? If we look at descriptions of the known alternatives, we will find that they are focused around work methods and work organization, and that they normally stop with the ideas of how work can be better *managed* through improved working methods, such as teamwork. But these suggestions lack any consideration of alternatives in relation to the distribution of power. It is the case that *work methods* are the result of how we choose to organize the work-situation. The power structure is at the root of the work methods that we create. When the power structure is in place in the organization, it informs how we are going to get the job done: either in a hierarchical way based on superiors and subordinates, or in a horizontal and egalitarian way based on equals. Rothschild⁹ refers in her paper to the research of Rosabeth Moss Kanter who argues that it is the structural features of modern organizations that determine organizational behaviour, much more than individual attributes. Therefore we have to start by shaping the structure, before we can develop the appropriate work methods, conditions and forms.

Other experts in the field of work still argue that we don't have to change the current structure of our organizations. All that is necessary, they claim, is to change people's attitudes. Robert W. Fuller¹⁸ uses this argument for the preservation of the status quo in regard to the contemporary hierarchical structure of organizations. He says: "The authority of rank is so commonly misused that some jump to the conclusion that rank itself is the problem and that the solution is to do away with it. This kind of egalitarianism ignores the fact that people are inherently unequal... and that differences of rank in a particular context may correctly reflect this. The trouble is not with rank per se but with the abuse of rank. We rightfully admire and love authorities... who use the power of their rank in an exemplary way. Accepting their leadership entails no loss of dignity or opportunity by subordinates." In response, Wanda Marie Pasz says: "It is the myth of the benevolent ruler that beloved bosses use their power in exemplary ways. The benign dictator or monarch who is so beloved by his subjects that they don't care about freedom. They want to submit. Their allegiance to their ruler doesn't cost them any loss of opportunity or dignity either (as long they continue in their brainwashed state). ... Since terms like 'dictator' or 'ruler' don't sit well with people in a democratic society, the workplace rulers are called 'leaders'. Accepting subjugation to them is, as Fuller puts it, 'accepting their leadership'."

Fuller states further: "Given the serious consequences of confusing rankism (abuse of rank) and rank, it bears repeating that many power differentials are legitimate and that inveighing against them or against the differences in rank that mirror them is misguided and futile. Proposing to do away with differences in ranks makes about as much sense as the notion of doing away with differences in race or gender. Without a system of ranking, complex institutions might slip into a state of disorganization, if not anarchy." To Fuller's statement about the risk of anarchy without a system of ranking, we maintain

that anarchy, disorganization and chaos will only appear when people are not autonomous, and therefore cannot take personal responsibility for their own situation in the workplace.

Fuller is concerned about the abuse of rank (rankism) but does not see that rankism depends on a corresponding power structure in the organization which, if we follow his reasoning, should be able to remove the main causes of rankism. He states for example that individual differences and inequalities must be reflected in corresponding differences in ranks, but cannot at the same time see that the system of rank is the cause of rankism. Because the system of rank is based upon hierarchical structuring, the system is not able to remove inequality in human relationships. Wanda Marie Pasz responds to Fuller as follows: "He frames the oppressive system as something that is good and natural and is only a problem to the extent that certain managers get carried away with their power and do not-very-nice-things with it. Rank is good. Rankism is bad. He fails to recognize (or even to explore) that there is a causal relationship between rank and rankism. Rank not only causes rankism - it demands rankism. If you don't treat your subordinates like subordinates, you're going to get into trouble as a manager sooner or later." She writes further: "Superiority is bestowed on the rankist. The rankist must be superior as a condition of his employment. The concept of sorting humans into different ranks is presented as something innate - just like nature sorts humans into different racial groups. Therefore individual differences and diversity in the workplace will be suppressed and oppressed as long as power is connected to position and rank."

William Bridges¹⁹ also deals with the preservation of current structures in organizational life. He argues: "Since the ability to manage transition is tied to the realities of an actual leader in an actual situation, mutual trust between advisor (external consultant) and leader is essential." Bridges focuses on the leader to facilitate change by getting people through periods of transition through control by the leader. The leader can get people to *transition* and in the next turn *create change*. Bridges does not see that a connection between the individual's inner processes and the corresponding organizational structure will be necessary to transform these individual processes to ones of individual responsibility and personal independence. In Bridges' mind it is the leader who prompts both transformation and change within the individual, through a hierarchical structure. Bridges concludes: "The best leadership programs implicitly address the challenge of understanding change, they are experiential, tailored to the needs of the leader, and based on delivering real-world results."

If we are working towards real participation and are in need of real participative methods, we have to create a corresponding structure that is horizontal and egalitarian. This development will be based on our knowledge that only equality amongst people, with the absence of ranks and positions, can create sufficient real participation in the workplace. If we do believe in true personal freedom and mutual trust as the means to create individual responsibility and personal independence at work, we have to make a complete break with vertical forms of relating and start moving toward a horizontal way of structuring the power flow in the organization.

The horizontal and egalitarian route to structuring the organization

To describe the horizontal and egalitarian approach we will start with a description of a model that gives us some alternative options in relation to power - whether we want to just be in control over ourselves or in control over others. To get the gist of this model, imagine that you are on a train journey and have the option of stopping at three different stations. You can also change your destination and go on with your journey to another station on the track. By choosing and selecting the respective stations, you gain different perspectives on how your personality will "match up" to the conditions at the different stations.

Station 1:

At this first stop you alight with the purpose of seizing as much power as possible on behalf of yourself and at the expense of others. You aim to protect all the power you get and are dependent

on joining forces with others who also operate as power-snatchers and power-holders. The system of control you have to establish and maintain is characterized as self-protecting, self-affirmative and self-preservative. At the first stop you can feed on the power of your respective rank and position. You will consequently get power for yourself by taking power away from others. At this stop the power balance is based upon the principle: "Empowering some by disempowering others".

Station 2:

At the second stop you alight with the purpose of sharing the power you acquire with others. You aim to achieve power by bringing what you get to others. To get power at this station you have to build a shared understanding with others so you can be allowed to acquire power through sharing. You are dependent on other's co-operation and trust. You must contribute to protecting the shared power and be focused on combating threats from outside. The system of control at this station is characterized as self-given, self-sharing, mutual protecting and self-preservative. At this stop you consequently get power by collaboration and co-operation with others. The power balance is based upon the principle: "Empowering yourself by empowering others".

Station 3:

At the third stop you alight with the purpose of giving away all of your power before you are supplied with new power. You aim to give away all your power, control, status and rank voluntarily and unconditionally, before you are entitled to get power from the common power-source. You are at this stop seeking power by giving up any forms of protection and personal security, and place your destiny in the hands of the common interest for supplying you with the power you will need to do your tasks. The system of control at this station is characterized as self-given, mutual confidence, and self-preservative. At this stop you consequently get power by trusting yourself and others unconditionally, and with a spirit of absolute belief in what you can obtain by giving to others what you have before you can expect to get something back. At this stop the power balance is based on the principle: "Dis-empowering yourself before you get self-empowered".

In my article "**No-one to command and control**"²⁰ I presented some guidelines for a new power structure in the workplace. This concept is based on the idea of ensuring that control resides within, rather than outside, the individual. In this way the individual develops the ability and capability to function as a responsible and independent person in the workplace based on absolute personal freedom and mutual trust. Through this personal transition, external steering-systems and steering-people are no longer needed. As I stated in the article: "Without a change in structure, people will continue their current practices based on their beliefs, habits and mental patterns that these creates. Therefore a different conception of leadership (individual, personal and not by rank) is needed - one that empowers the person (inside authority and personal power) and removes the position (outside authority and positional power)". This reasoning is based upon our beliefs about the capabilities and abilities of our fellow human beings to act as fully responsible and independent individuals.

What do we mean by "responsible"? When we take on responsibility we feel responsible. The person who feels responsible will give away responsibility to others without disclaiming his or her personal responsibility. The expression "give away responsibility to others" means that we show other people trust. Then we can get responsibility from others in that we can also be shown trust. When we, however, have responsibility imposed upon us from others (for example superiors) we are not able to feel the same sense of responsibility. The person who does not feel responsible will not want give away his or her responsibility to others. Without a sense of responsibility, we are not able to show others personal trust, which is the main condition in achieving mutual trust in the workplace. We show other people trust and can give away trust to others when we are permitted and able to take personal responsibility for our own actions. To be responsible as a human being, it is therefore necessary to take personal responsibility ourselves. We will not easily assume and take on responsibility where we are given responsibility by others through their control over our own actions.

We can also consider the phenomenon of "freedom" in relation to the consequences of the steering-system and the steering-mechanisms in the workplace in the following way: in externally- directed systems (steering outside the individual) we are relating to each other's positions and ranks. In this type of positional based system the position and rank are primary. In internally directed systems (steering inside the individual) we are relating to each other's persons. In this type of individual-based system the person, competence and relations between people are primary. In externally- directed systems it is impossible to prevent or solve conflicts between individuals because relations between people are not built in as a mechanism into the steering system. In internally directed systems, however, conflicts are prevented or solved because the relations between people are built-in as a steering mechanism. Common arguments are often presented in the sense that conflicts are natural and normal features in organizational life, and that conflicts between individuals always will occur in one way or another.

Then we can talk about two types of value-based steering system in the workplace with in-built mechanisms:

1. A steering-system (horizontal and egalitarian) based on personal freedom and mutual trust.
2. A steering-system (vertical and hierarchical) based on lack of freedom and mutual trust.

In the egalitarian structure there is no climbing and no need for fighting each other because people do not need to compete with each other for survival. In this structure work is personalised in relation to individual responsibilities, coherent roles, functions and tasks. People work with an unconditional trust in themselves and in each other. In that respect people are able to co-operate with each other and ask for help when help is needed. People are used to supporting each other because they know that they are at the same time supporting themselves. The egalitarian structure is characterized by an ongoing communicating process between equal human beings throughout their personalities, their individual authorities and personal competencies. Based on this individual-steering structure, individuals understand and acknowledge their mutual dependence on each other. They are ready to share and support each other.

Through this concept of organizing the workplace in an egalitarian way, the control of work and workers is internalised and is based on total and absolute personalised responsibility and independence. This structure creates personal control of power and the confidence to use this power to execute individually-made decisions. In the next round, this structuring of power will be the basic element in creating real conditions for communication and co-operation between people.

To create a community of people who are able to act unanimously to get work done, the main condition is that the unanimous creation is based upon the following value and principle:

The individual must become a sovereign human being who is able to discover, experience and comprehend him or herself as a part of the community and understand that individuals are mutually dependent as long as those individuals act and behave as sovereign individuals.

Collectivism did not work as an organizational form because of the lack of understanding that a collective consists of individuals and must base its organizational structure on this fact. When individuals are functioning responsibly and independently based on their total personal freedom and mutual trust, and when they have obtained personal confidence in themselves, they are mature enough to evolve a collective process of working together - for example in work-groups. Then the collective becomes a reality because of the real empowerment of the individual as an independent human being. Then individuals can, for the first time, start to use the expression "I" and "me" in reference to their contribution to the group process, and the terms "we" and "our" in reference to the common contributions and results of the work-group. The collective drifts into a hierarchical structure when it doesn't acknowledge the sovereignty of the individual. Instead, the collective creates ranks and positions for superiors and subordinates and systems for control and command. In this way the collective becomes an authoritarian and totalitarian regime based on fear instead of trust.

We can also develop a definition of "solidarity". Solidarity evolves when individuals are treated as the people they are (and not as the people others want them to be). Solidarity is a consequence of mutuality, equality and equity between human beings based on their individuality as human beings with equal access to freedom and trust in the workplace.

When an egalitarian power structure is implemented as a formal reality in the organization, people will start to relate to each other as equals. Then they will be able to share what they are and what they have with others without being afraid of losing anything and without fear of being punished for being who they are.

Rune Olsen, May 2006

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Endnotes

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