

EXTENDING THE CATALYTIC AND TRANSFORMATIVE POTENTIAL OF GRIDS USING A CONGRUENT TECHNIQUE: AN EXEMPLAR STUDY OF MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT

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We present a project where constructivist techniques (repertory grid interview, focus group and diary-in-group) were combined in participative, action research. The process sustained the development of leadership and praxis through (1) individual reflection grounded in personal experiences and (2) group reflection through the shared and revised construing of pertinent issues. Throughout the project the participating managers addressed matters important to them in their professional role. The short extracts of data presented give an insight in the managers' complex work situation, the dilemmas that they are facing and how they were stimulated to address the problems arising.

Keywords: *repertory grid technique, diary, management development*

INTRODUCTION

The Swedish universities' third task, besides higher education teaching and research, is to relate to and collaborate with practitioners in the local community in which it is situated to support development processes. However a recent report (Westlund, 2004) shows that the universities fulfil this task only to a minor extent, and thereby often play a minor role in regional development processes. According to Brulin (2001), this underlines the need for the development of a participatory and action-oriented research approach focused on new understandings of and enhancement of praxis.

Such an approach aspires to the cultivation of the 'reflective practitioner' discussed by Argyris and Schön (1985) and Schön (1983), in contrast to traditional leadership research, which has been criticised by Alvesson (1996) for being dominated by positivistic and neo-positivistic assumptions and a concentration on rules and procedures. These ideas of participation and action-orientation brought together with constructivist psychology form the methodological basis of the municipal leadership development project presented below to illustrate the power of the combined methodology and the potential in-

herent in university-community partnerships. The project formed part of a larger research project to explore and improve leadership in a Swedish municipality.

Public sector organisations and professional development

The characteristics and dilemmas of work in public sector organisations have been discussed in the classical works of Lipsky (1980) and Abbot (1988) and more recently in Swedish public sector settings by Wallenberg (1997); Aili (2002) and Österlind and Denicolo (A) (in manuscript). An increasing part of the responsibility for public service production has, according to Wallenberg, shifted from the Government to the Swedish municipalities who have turned into major producers of care and education. The quality of the services received are of major importance for the individuals' personal wellbeing and the clients and pupils are to a large extent dependent on services produced since few, if any, private alternatives exist. Wallenberg points out the tensions between the municipalities' general goals: effective service production; local democracy; and qual-

ity/legal rights of the individual. The demand for cost efficiency, given priority out of economic necessity, often conflicts with the demand for quality/the legal rights of the individual. Cost control also leads to a conflict between, on the one hand, quick decisions and professional judgements and, on the other, slower democratic decision-making processes.

Swedish municipal managers often have a professional background related to the area that they are charged with managing. This can, especially in times where demands for increased quality are raised as the same time as financial cutbacks, result in further dilemmas where the professional is caught in the middle between political decisions involving financial restrictions on the one side and professional knowledge and legislation (giving the citizens the right to certain 'service level') on the other. (The conflict between professional ideals and administrative theories is described in the context of maternity welfare by Aili and in a wider context by Österlind and Denicolo (A)).

Suffice it to say here that these managers, caught between a plethora of dilemmas, find it difficult to address their own personal development needs and even harder to instigate and maintain group development needs without external support and advice. Yet individual and group development, in response to change in the work environment, is essential if the system is to be productive and effective.

Individual's reactions to change are not inevitably positive. Kelly (1955) found that the constructs *treat, fear, anxiety, guilt, aggressiveness* and *hostility* are related to transition. This anxiety can be reduced by group learning processes.

"Once a group has learned to hold common assumptions, the resulting automatic patterns of perceiving, thinking, feeling and behaving provide meaning, stability and comfort; the anxiety that results from the inability to understand or predict events happening around the group is reduced by the shared learning."
(Schein, 1990, p.111)

From a constructivist orientation, explicit exploration of professional perspectives could play an important role for the organisation members as, according to Kelly's experience corollary, "*a person's construction system varies as he successively con-*

strues the replications of events" (Kelly, 1955: p 50). Work group members need some commonality, that is to share some common ideals but, since the sociality corollary extends the commonality corollary, in order to interact effectively, they need to be able to construe issues from the perspective of the diverse views generated by the other group members. Furthermore, validation by others of each person's own construct system is important in the development of closer relationships. The validation of professional construct systems by colleagues provides a greater potential for and, indeed, likelihood of construct similarity within the professional group (Denicolo and Pope, 2001).

This calls for action oriented and participative approaches where methods appropriate for exploration and change are used, and where the researcher's role is to facilitate motivated participants' exploration of and work on problems defined by themselves on their own initiative, hereby involving motivated participants in intensive self-analysis. (Schein, p. 112).

The project described below started with the participating managers' individual explorations of their professional role. When sharing their individual experiences in a group session, they found that they had a mutual interest in personal and group development hence improving both professional practice and their work situations.

THE PROJECT - CATALYSING TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN A MUNICIPAL CARE ORGANISATION

The project involved one of three geographical districts of the department of community care for older and/or people with disabilities, in a municipality where there exist few private care alternatives. The municipal administration was the second largest in financial turnover and in numbers of personnel. At the time of the project, it was involved in organisational changing processes with the objective to improve both financial efficiency and quality of service to the clients, the latter involving a quality guarantee.

In the 'new' organisation the care- and health-care staff were to work in flexible teams, determined by the clients' individual needs. New managerial

posts (district managers and team managers) were created and replaced the former managerial levels. The team manager position involved an increased number of *care staff members* and the incorporation of *professional groups* (nurses, physiotherapist and occupational therapists).

None of the managers from the 'old' organisation was guaranteed a new managerial position. This meant that managers from the 'old' organisation had had, as anyone else interested in a new managerial position in the 'new' organisation, to apply in open competition and to undergo the same tests as the external candidates. Therefore the context was one in which security and trust had recently taken a severe blow.

Participants

In this project all ten municipal team managers in the district (eight women and two men), wanted to develop their leadership role and their managerial group. Each team manager was in charge of 50-70 staff members. Together with their superior, the district manager, they formed the district's managerial group. Among them were represented three different professions (social care, nursing and personnel management).

Methods - Combining Repertory Grid Interviews and Diary-in-Group Method

The participating managers' perspectives and their understanding of their work situation and their leadership role were central to the project. A prime objective was to facilitate development at a personal and group level and to transform practice. Methods were chosen in order to facilitate these processes. The participating managers contributed to the planning, realisation and validation of the project, in the true spirit of a combined constructivist and action research enterprise (Pope and Denicolo, 1991).

The first part of the project involved individual development. For this *Repertory Grid interviews* focusing on the exploration of own tasks, including individual feedback at the end of each interview session, were conducted in 2003. Feedback on a group level was generated as the aggregated results from interviews were analysed and discussed in a

focus group session. At that time all participating managers expressed an interest in a continued group exploration of their leadership experiences. This led to the initiation of a diary-in-group-project that took place during 2004. The *diary-in-group* project focused on individual and group development. The managers explored their individual activities and experiences by keeping a personal diary for a period of two days. In the subsequent group sessions the individual experiences noted in the diaries were developed and discussed.

The results from the repertory grid interviews and focus group session are summarised below (extended results are found in Österlind and Denicolo (A) in manuscript) and exemplified at the individual level for each intervention technique by the results from one participant (Monica). Thereafter the diary-in-group project is described at greater length, including a summary of the theoretical background. A description of the procedure and the material gained from the project is followed by a presentation of the first, preliminary results (extended results are found in Österlind and Denicolo (B) in manuscript), again providing illustrative material from Monica (one of the participants). The paper concludes with suggestions for practice derived from this combination of methods.

SUMMARY OF PROCEDURE AND RESULTS OF THE REPERTORY GRID INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUP

The repertory grid interview explores the personal constructs of an individual. In this project repertory grid interviews were used to explore the managers' experiences of their leadership role during their daily work. The theme for these interviews was "*my tasks and responsibilities as a team manager*". In this procedure each manager individually identified the tasks/assignments that they perform as team managers (*elements*) and then considered them in triads to identify similarities and differences (*constructs*) between them on a range of dimensions.

The interviews took place in the participant's workplace. Each interview was recorded on audio tape. The interviews were performed with computer-aid (Rep Grid II), which enabled an immediate feedback of the graphic representations of the interview results to the participant. Thus an oppor-

tunity was provided for these representations to be used as a basis for discussion, in order to validate and amplify the results (Smith, 1995).

The role of and results from a repertory grid interview have been discussed by several authors. Bell (2005) states that

“... the information in a grid clearly depends on only the elements and constructs that have been included.” (Bell, 2005 p. 68.)

are exemplified at individual level by Monica’s grid and commentary. In addition to this five examples are presented hereby (1) illustrating the interview transcript’s potential to provide deepened or additional information to the grid itself and (2) demonstrating the catalyst potential that, according to Denicolo and Pope (2001), lay in the repertory grid procedure. We conclude this section by presenting a summary of an aggregation of the interview results from the whole group.

Here the results from the repertory grid interviews

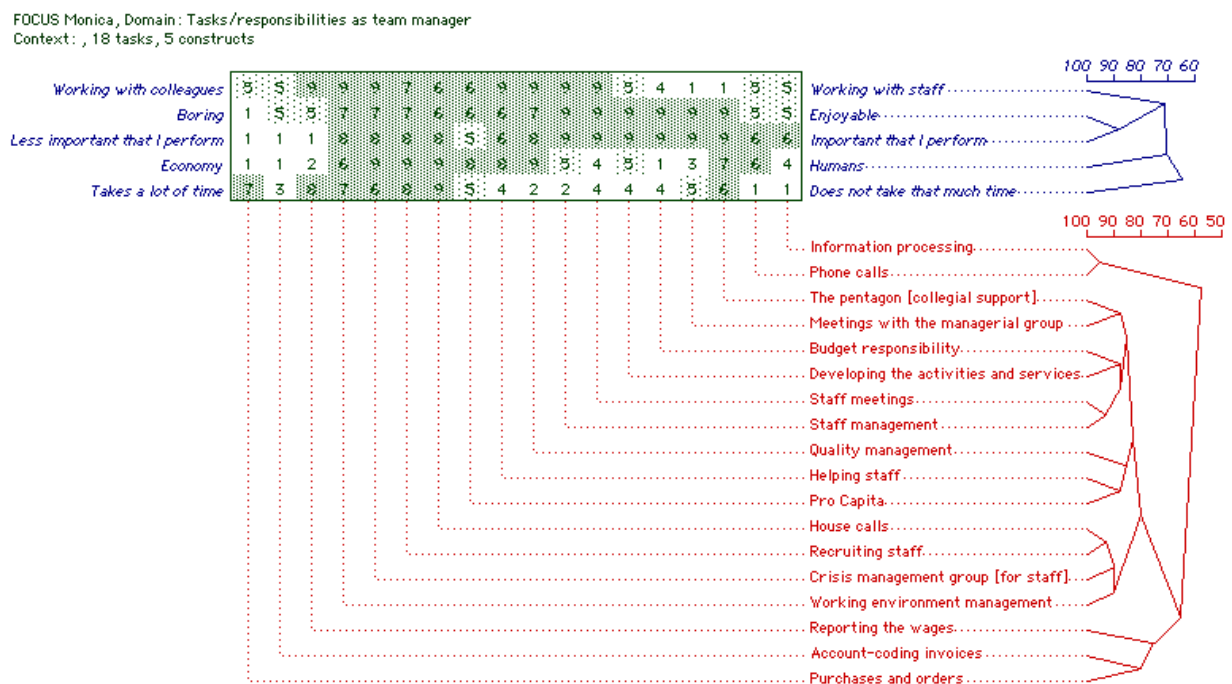


Figure 1: *Monica’s Grid* (Programme WebGrid III, Gaines and Shaw, 2005)

Results at individual level – Monica’s interview

The analysis of *Monica’s grid* (Figure 1) shows that she identified 18 types of tasks or responsibilities that she performs as team manager [elements] (The number in brackets indicates the order in which these were generated.). These tasks can be grouped into five categories.

(I) *Staff related matters* is by numbers the largest embracing the six elements: ‘Staff manage-

ment’ (1), ‘Reporting the wages’ (4), ‘Staff meetings’ (7), ‘Helping staff’ [with forms etc] (10), ‘Recruiting staff’ (11) and ‘Crisis management group’ [for staff] (17).

(II) *Managerial responsibilities* is composed by the five elements ‘Working environment management’ (12), ‘Quality management’ (13), ‘Developing the activities and services’ (18), ‘Meetings with the managerial group’ (14) and ‘The pentagon’ [collegial support] (15).

(III) *Financial matters* consists of the three ele-

ments: 'Budget responsibility' (2); 'Account-coding invoices' (5) and 'Purchases and orders' (8).

Categories IV and V consists of two elements each: (IV) *Client related matters*: 'Pro Capita' [implementing awarded home-help service] (3) and 'House calls' (6) and (V) *Communication* 'Information processing' (16) and 'Phone calls' (9).

In total Monica generated the five construct pairs below (The number in brackets indicates the order in which these were generated):

Working with colleagues – Working with staff (1)
Economy – Humans (2)
Takes a lot of time – Does not take that much time (3)
Boring – Enjoyable (4)
Less important that I perform [as team manager] - Important that I perform (5)

The grid shows that most of Monica's tasks are of a nature that she thinks fits with the role of a team manager (11 out of 18). The most important tasks are: 'Staff management', 'Staff meetings', 'Developing activities and services', 'Budget responsibility', 'Meetings with the managerial group' and 'The pentagon' [collegial support]. These are also the tasks that she *enjoys* the most. In all she construe all but one ('Purchases and orders' that she finds *boring*) of her tasks as *enjoyable* or *OK*.

The five tasks that consume most of her time are: 'Staff management', 'Quality management', 'Information processing', 'Phone calls', and 'Account-coding invoices'. Monica considers the first three to be vital to her role, but the last two, related to communication, she thinks are tasks that, to some extent, could be delegated. In particular, 'Account-coding invoices' is a task that she considers *less important that she (the team manager) perform*.

The interview transcript's potential

The analysis of the transcription of a repertory grid interview provides information, in addition to that found in the grid itself, which is useful for a deeper analysis and interpretation of the grid on *how* the participant *elicits her/his elements* (in this case the

tasks performed as a team manager) and *how 'easily' they were generated*. It also enables us to see *more of the process of construing elicited elements*, such as what triads were generated which constructs and details of explorations of the constructs during, for instance, laddering.

Example I – the refinement of an element

When Monica elicited her fourth element she initially defined it 'Doing the wage statements' but after reasoning aloud with herself she redefined it to 'Reporting the wages'

"...because we send them. I check the wage statements and sign them. You have to do that: signing and checking the wage statements."

Example II – the nature of an element

In the case of the generation of the element 'telephone calls' the transcripts provided additional information which proved useful to an understanding of why this element was construed as *a task that takes a lot of my time*:

"I get so many phone calls. The last six months I have had an awful lot because [in addition to normal assignments] I also have got the personal assistants [workers who give personal support to disabled people] and because of that there have been many house calls and staff matters."

Example III – the nature of a construct

The analysis of the interview transcript provides additional information about the construct *Important that I perform [in my role as team manager] – Less important that I perform*. Tasks that Monica placed between these two construct poles she considered to be *tasks that could be done in cooperation with someone else*. Those at the extremes were either her sole responsibility or could be done by someone else.

Example IV – the generation of triads

The first generated triad of elements consisted of

‘staff meetings’, ‘quality management systems’ and ‘the pentagon’ [a group of team managers] where Monica construed the first two as *tasks where she worked together with her staff* whilst the latter was construed as *"more of a support for me, one step up, with my colleagues"*.

Example V - demonstrating the repertory grid procedure's catalyst potential -information which is not at all found in the grid

The interview transcript can also provide additional information, which does not appear in the grid, thus providing evidence of the repertory grid procedure's resilience as a conversational tool.

"The grid is perhaps best seen as a catalyst within conversation between investigator and the individual. It can allow insight into some of the ways in which the individual construes the particular aspects of his or her world which is being investigated." (Pope & Denicolo, 2001 p. 89)

In our exemplar case the information derived from Monica's grid could lead to the conclusion that she works under considerable stress. This picture is nuanced by the quotation below from the transcription of Monica's interview where she reflects on her work situation at the end of her interview:

"I don't really feel stressed in my work. But all spring I have had two areas, at least one and a half, and in the one two new team managers [were appointed], so clearly it has ... but then one have to make up ones mind for what you are supposed handle as a human being and keep your head above the surface and you know that it is for a limited period of time. But otherwise I don't think our work is that stressful. There are so many different things and you can hardly have a ... full diary because then it can be a bit stressful, because there are always acute situations that you have to handle first. But that's one thing you've got to learn as you go along, while working."

(Monica)

The picture of Monica as team manager

In Monica's grid, as well as in the transcript from the focus group session (see below), a picture emerges of a team manager with a large sphere of operations, embracing a large variety of tasks and responsibilities most of which she enjoys performing. She seems to have developed and refined personal strategies for handling what might otherwise be perceived as a stressful and fragmented work situation, in which the boring routine tasks that could just as well (or even better) be performed by someone else become providers of badly needed breathing space, time to gather one's thoughts. This picture is further elaborated in Monica's diary (see the diary in group project below).

An aggregation of the interview results from the whole group

At an aggregated level the results showed that the team managers' tasks can be divided into two main groups:

- (1) A majority of (skilled) tasks that have to be accomplished by the team manager. These tasks were construed as *stimulating, challenging, demanding* and *in line with their own profession/education*.
- (2) A minority, but not an insignificant number, of (mostly unskilled administrative) tasks that could be done by (or in co-operation with) someone else. These were construed as tasks that are *not in line with the team manager's own profession / education* and were considered to be *boring* and as *stealing time from the tasks that had to be accomplished by the team manager*.

In summary, the team managers had a complex work situation: a new organisational structure, quality system and way of working; some personnel not dedicated to the new 'order'; lack of job description; many different tasks; little or no 'organised' personal development. The results indicated that the managers' leadership roles to a great extent were developed through their own construal of their tasks.

The aggregated results of these interviews were

discussed in a focus group session with the participating managers. They found that the results from the interviews showed a vivid picture of the nuances and complexity of their tasks and their role. The exploration and reflection on their roles and work situations had been a positive experience for all of them.

The focus group session

Reflexivity is a central theme in Kelly's philosophy (Kelly, 1955; Fransella, 2005; Dalton and Dunnett, 1992). The focus group interview is a well recognised method for "*listening to people and learning from them*" (Morgan, 1998, p.9). According to Madriz (2000), focus-group interviews facilitate the creation of multiple lines of communication and collective human interaction. They are especially useful in participative research since they decrease the researcher's influence over the interview process and thereby give more weight to the participants' opinions.

By the time the focus group session took place, the managerial group had enlarged by two newly recruited team managers who took part in the session. At the initial phase of this session the participants discussed and analysed the aggregated results from the repertory grid interviews and their experiences from participating in these sessions. The discussion however soon shifted into a further exploration of the team manager role, which filled the greater part of the session, raising and discussing important aspects and dilemmas related to the role as such and to the team managers' work situation.

The transcript from this session shows a large range of variation in the length and frequency of the participants' contributions. Monica made few (3) contributions to the focus group session. In her longest entry she reflects over the diversity of her tasks:

"Not being responsible for a large building any longer, on the one hand it's less strenuous and that feels great, but on the other one still has tough tasks and easy tasks. To me there's something positive about carrying out these easy tasks while pondering intensively over a problem. I can relive some of the pressure by completing these undemanding

*tasks. Like yesterday when I was setting the wage rates. I was walking around harping on the same string. Then it was good to have something like that I think it's rather good to be able to alternate. It's a great difference only having one, being specialised on one thing. And that's part of what this team was supposed to be about, that one should have larger, more comprehensive. I don't believe in it that much. One can't be competent in **that** many areas."*

(Monica)

Other issues discussed in the focus group session included: delegating tasks; quality demands vs. inadequate resources; role conflicts. The team manager role was a recurring topic. One of the participants (Gertrude) described the team manager role as a box, a framework, within which things happens. "*One way or another you are supposed to stay in the box anyhow, so that it holds together.*" This metaphor was elaborated by other participants on what was in their boxes, what was not and what ought to be there. Among the things considered missing was systematic collegial support.

Another participant (Susanna) reflected on how the two new colleagues in the group had described their difficult work situations, and their experiences of lack of support and how she had reacted to that and started to reflect about herself and her colleagues as a managerial group.

"You can't say that we offer our help. And I thought: How could I actually have been of any help? We haven't actually got a system for, as you called it, supporting one and other. Each one makes their own happiness, and good luck to you and hope you feel well next week too. It's tough! We don't actually take care of one and other. But I'm just like that myself. I am fostered within the old system, so I'm not that considerate towards my colleagues. Now I've got Angela [team manager colleague], she is kind and nice and says positive things. I'm not used to things being commented at all. I'm thinking maybe one should learn how to do it some time."

(Susanna)

This was seconded by other participants who filled

in on the importance of getting feedback and support from colleagues. The picture was further enhanced by Angela who reflected on this theme in relation to the nature of the team manager role and tasks, regretting the lack of care for the carers.

"We have got a job that is based on us being supportive and leaders of development and often you are so focused on seeing these things that you can support and encourage within others. It is necessary that we get it ourselves from time to time."

(Angela)

During the last part of the focus group session the lack of collegial support was discussed in conjunction with the potential of a diary-in-group project. The pros and cons with such a project were discussed. The team managers' fears that participation would increase their heavy workloads were superseded by the anticipation of a positive outcome for themselves as individuals and as a managerial group. Among their expectations were perceived opportunities to: "get to know each other" within the managerial group and to discover new qualities in colleagues; find out "what one actually does" and to "reflect over and get feedback on" that; get help to "unlock and look into" your "box" (see above) and maybe even to "throw the old box away and get a new one".

In all, the participating managers found the focus group process very useful in its own right beyond the actual data disclosed. It also turned out to be of importance for the initiation of the diary-in-group project (described below) in which the participating team managers continued to develop their group construal and re-construal of their professional roles.

THE DIARY-IN-GROUP PROJECT

In a project that aims at transforming praxis within organisational settings it is critical that techniques that explore and support individual development are combined with techniques that offer ways for researchers and participants to listen to the plural voices of others. An elaboration of the focus group technique, the Diary-in-Group method (Lindén, 1996) is especially well suited for a constructivist,

participatory approach since it combines the individual, subjective perspective with the advantages of group interaction and adds a time dimension. The process includes individual *diary writing* and *group sessions* in which the participants read from their personal diaries. The group members, including the diarist, are free to reflect on the readings, explore ideas and ask questions. According to Lindén:

"The diary-in-group method can be used as an instrument for bridging the gap between that which is close to experience (contextual) and that which is distal (decontextualised) or which is found at a conceptual level." (p. 77).

The process thereby sustains both personal and group development over time.

Procedure

Co-operative inquiry is based on people examining their own experiences and actions carefully in collaboration with others. According to Heron and Reason (2001) groups of up to twelve persons can work well while a group of fewer than six would be too small and lack variety of experience. This was taken into consideration when the procedure of the diary project was negotiated. The team managers' earlier experiences of dividing the group into two smaller groups in supervision had been mostly negative. Now they had a strong reason for working together as an entire managerial group (ten people) in the project, in order to sustain their mutual development.

The group met once every second week (for ten three hour sessions) to explore and develop their leadership and spheres of activities. Each team manager committed to writing diary notations for two days and sharing her or his writings and experiences with the group at a group session. The group agreed to meet for ten diary sessions thereby allowing each and every one of the group members to get feedback on their personal diary. It was agreed that every one should try to be present at as many sessions as possible, leaving it up to the individual to prioritise. The managers took turns in hosting the sessions with each session dedicated to the diary of

that day's hostess or host. Each session started by the diarist's reading from her/his diary. These readings were interleaved with questions and reflections from herself/himself and from the fellow managers. The sessions were tape-recorded and Österlind was present at each session as facilitator.

Material

The material from the diary-in-group project consists of copious material in the form of (1) ten individual two day diaries and (2) transcriptions from ten group discussion sessions.

Diary Notations

The individual diary notations show diversity in writing styles. Most diaries consist of brief notations on events and persons related to these while some diaries are elaborated and embrace not only what was done and with whom but also an elaboration on feelings, thoughts and dilemmas generated. The nature of the diary texts is exemplified below by the first day in Monica's diary.

Today I did not feel so good. Felt down. When I sat in the car and listened to the radio they spoke about Happiness. Least of all what I felt at this moment. What makes you happy? Maybe to write it down one day, maybe there are things that make you happy. They talked about people who felt happiness in being alone. That was when I felt: How does one manage?

When I got to work I listened to the answering machine. Someone had reported sick for the next month. She handles the temporary positions and the vacations. A lot of thoughts ran through my head. 1 ½ persons on sick-leave in the same work group at the start of the planning for the summer holidays. Normally it works out. Gave it some more thought.

Logged onto my PC. Checking my e-mails, when I hear the nurse thanking Susanne for yesterday afternoon. Had to go and listen.

Development discussion [with staff member, related to performance and salary]. Very good to sit down with each [staff member] but it takes much longer than the estimated 20 minutes. It takes approximately 40 minutes.

Both phones ringing. Prioritize! Continue to go thorough the e-mails and reply to those who need an answer. E-mail to Elizabeth on three staff members' length of employment.

Gertrude phoned. She had a person who falls under the Employment Protection Act who wanted to work nights. Many phone calls to check who had the longest period of service.

09.40 Coffee

New development discussion scheduled for 10.00. Got time enough to make a phone call to someone who wanted a trainee job. The development discussion did not take place. She was ill.

Went to copy information on medical examination for the night staff. Had to exchange toner in the copying machine. Checked yesterday's mail.

Mobile telephone battery died. Borrowed the nurse's charger. Made some phone calls.

New development discussion. Had to make a new appointment since she arrived unprepared, did not bring her form. We talked about work. She thinks it's a tough job.

Lunch

Sorted the internal mail. Checked the answering machine. Returned calls. Someone called concerning transportation service and a remote control to a door opener. Wrote down name and address and sent on to occupational therapist and transportation service administrator.

Did some tidying in my mailbox. Realised

that I ought to phone those who were going to get a rise in salary and were staying at home for one reason or another. Seven people. Got hold of two.

Sent notification of illness to the regional social insurance office.

15.00 Meeting with nights staff in E-village. Two persons showed up. We talked some and had coffee. Was able to have a development discussion with one of them.

Home by 17.00.

(Monica's diary - Day 1)

Transcripts from the group sessions

The transcriptions from the group sessions consist of the diary writer's readings of and elaborations over her or his diary notations (exemplified below by Monica's readings from the first paragraph of her diary, above in **bold** face) interspersed with the colleagues' (and to a minor extent the facilitator's) comments and questions.

"I start with Thursday March 11th. I did not feel that good when I sat in my car and was about to drive to work. On the radio they started to talk about happiness and I thought: Now then, what's this all about? Why do they talk about happiness? It was the least I could think of at that moment. And they went on talking about what makes you happy. And I thought: Hm, what is it really that makes people happy. I drove on the highway and thought: well, maybe one should write it down after all. Maybe there are things in life that make you happy after all. And then they started talking about that there is a great number of people in the world and in Sweden who find happiness in solitude. And this is a terrible threat to me. I thought: How does one manage?

And then I arrived at work. It was such a strong day, the starting of the morning. That is when I thought: Now, TODAY I will write my diary. I have been thinking of this all the time. What is it that actually makes you

happy? I think that maybe these are the kind of things that one should reflect on."

(Transcript: Monica's reading of the first paragraph of her diary – Day 1)

The length and nature of the group discussions on the different themes varied considerably. This is illustrated by a description of the lengthy discussion that followed Monica's relatively short diary notation on a cancelled development discussion (the second paragraph in **bold** type above). This paragraph, which consists of only four sentences, gave rise to further questions and lengthy discussions (over three pages single spaced typed transcript). The facilitator opened the debate by asking for a clarification about what was discussed during the development discussions. Monica described how she normally goes about it. When she hesitated one of her colleagues would fill in.

There was a short question from Österlind on evaluation of criteria mentioned by Monica. Several colleagues described what they themselves do in this type of situation. This then led to a discussion on the pros and cons of the different procedures mentioned. Monica re-evaluated her own way and thought aloud over ways of improving the procedure for the development discussions. She asked for, and got, more detailed information from one of her colleagues. Another colleague referred to an occasion when she had been on a wage setting course, where she had given this colleague's method as a good example. The example had received praise from the expert for being "the right way to go about things".

Then the discussion turned to how to value and evaluate staff members' achievements on an individual and group level. This part of the group session (initiated by Monica's four sentences) concludes in the participants reflecting about how roles can change over time in work groups.

PRELIMINARY RESULTS FROM THE DIARY-IN-GROUP PROJECT

A day in a team manager's working life

An ordinary working day for a team manager can be summarised from the data. It starts at approximately eight o'clock, although the managers have fre-

quently left the office late in the evening before. When they arrive at work they start by checking the answering machine and e-mail inbox; several messages that demand attention will have accumulated.

It is not unusual that *the time going to and from* work is used for work related activities such as checking and even responding to messages left on their mobile phones or pondering over how to resolve unsolved problems. Since their units often are located in the outskirts of the municipality, they also spend time going to and from the head office in the city centre. In order to save valuable time it often happens that the managers grab some fast food and eat it in the car while driving to the next meeting.

Most of the team managers frequently *work on their coffee- and lunch 'breaks'*. They often "use" this time to have coffee and lunch with different staff members in order to give information and or feedback, "solve problems" that have occurred or to fulfil a kind of container or support function for staff members.

On the whole the team managers' working-days are characterised by *intermittent interruptions* (telephone calls, e-mails, questions from staff members) with a relatively high proportion of *tasks that can not be completed owing to factors out of the manager's control* (for instance, poorly functioning computer programmes, cancelled meetings or inability to get in contact with persons).

It is not all that unusual that the managers perform *tasks that are relatively unskilled*, in relation to their professional competence (picking up and date-stamping the mail; account-coding invoices; copying information brochures, changing the toner in the copying machine – cf. Monica's diary entry, etc.), which supports the results from the individual interviews with the team managers (Österlind and Denicolo (A) in manuscript).

Leadership dilemmas

A first analysis of the transcriptions from the *group sessions* indicates several leadership dilemmas. They are exemplified here by the *spider-in-the-web*, the *border patrol* and the *open-door* dilemmas.

The *spider-in-the web* dilemma was discussed on several occasions. This dilemma is partly related to the *flat organisational structure*, the team managers being in charge of 50 – 70 staff members and partly

related to the *large quantity of information* for which the team managers are the central conduit, thus forcing them into the role of an "information officer" who spends considerable time and energy on gathering, processing and distributing information from and to different people inside and outside the organisation.

The *border patrol* dilemma is related to their role as *municipal managers "guarding" the borderline to the county council*, making and claiming the distinctions of their organisation's area of responsibility towards the representatives of the county council, the *care of older people* being a local authority responsibility whilst the *medical attendance of the same people* is a county council responsibility. In times when heavy retrenchment programmes are carried out in both organisations this position is a tough one, especially since it also involves the delicate handling of the clients' rights and requests as well as the sometimes very firm views of their relatives on how "things should be".

The *open door* dilemma is related to the managers taking pride in "*being there*" for staff members, clients and relatives. At the same time they share the experience of the *negative effects that frequent interruptions' have on their personal performances*. Strategies for handling this dilemma, and the outcomes of trying out recommended strategies, were discussed in several sessions.

In one session *Gertrude* described how she had tried the recommendation she got in the previous meeting. On that particular day there were tasks that she needed to complete before going home, so she decided to follow the advice given to close the door to her office when she did not want to be disturbed. Behind the closed door, *Gertrude* sat down at her desk and started off on her chore. After a few minutes she was interrupted by a knock on the door and one of her staff members entered, asking: "*Why have you closed the door?*" *Gertrude* explained the need for some peace and quiet and got the relieved answer "*Oh! Then everything is all right then. We thought you might have been taken ill.*"

This seemingly pragmatic focus (door shut or open) is a simple manifestation of an underlying philosophical dilemma embedded in the role, balancing *approachability* needed to endorse staff members and *seclusion* essential to personal managerial effectiveness equally crucial to organisational efficacy.

Synopsis of results: reactive leadership

A brief summary of the data analysis and interpretation shows an overall picture of managers' *leadership strategies*, which are often *reactive* rather than *pro-active*. Most of them try to set an agenda for the day, which generally encompasses a few, presumably manageable, tasks and then they see what happens and act according to that. This could be a matter of personal *approach to work*. It can also be related to factors like the *frequent intermittent interruptions* and *tasks that can not be completed owing to factors out of the managers' control*. These problems, if not dealt with, can lead to *inefficient time management* and a *feeling of loss of control*.

In this project the managers made good use of the potential for transformation intrinsic in constructivist techniques used by identifying and confronting the problems occurring in their work performance.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR PRACTICE DEVELOPMENT

Short though the extracts from the data are in this paper, they serve to illustrate the potential of the general approach of combining constructivist techniques in participative, action research. For the study of complex issues such as the experiences of people at and in their work and for aiding the development of those people, psychologists must draw on a range of approaches and methods from across the discipline and other disciplines. However, in combining methods it is important to consider their congruence and how well they articulate with each other. This paper has described one combination that proved productive for professionals working in demanding, complex jobs in the community.

The repertory grid interviews acknowledged the individuality of each participant, while the focus group sharing of generalised results allowed for the identification of commonality and the development of sociality. The diary-in-group method similarly allowed for individual difference then provided both an opportunity for similarity to be noted, and constructs shared, and for constructs to be challenged and extended in a supportive atmosphere. The in-

roduction to these methods and the facilitation of the process thereby fulfilled the university's task to support local development processes by offering individual and group development.

The process sustained the development of leadership and praxis through (1) *individual reflection* grounded in personal experiences and (2) *group reflection* through the shared and revised construing of pertinent issues. Throughout the project the managers addressed matters important to them in their professional role. The participants' evaluations demonstrate that the process per se had positive effects on group climate and trust, observable in the development over time of the nature and depth of questions addressed during the project, and a continued willingness, beyond the project, to share problems and confront mutual problems together.

With groups of people who share similar concerns/interests and who are willing to share experiences over time in a long term situation to build up trust, we suggest that the diary-in-group method is a valuable constructivist technique that facilitates processes in which participants can explore in depth, and enhance, aspects of their professional roles in order to achieve sustainable leadership development and practice transformation within their organization.

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