A DEMOCRACY TO COME? THE POSSIBILITIES, PARADOXES AND PITFALLS OF NON HIERARCHICAL ORGANIZING

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THREE TALES OF (DE)NATURALIZING HIERARCHY
WHAT’S WRONG WITH HIERARCHY

• MANAGEMENT AS A COST (HAMEL, 2016)
• STIFLE INNOVATION/PRODUCTIVITY
• RIDGED, TOP-DOWN ORGANIZING
• SLOW DECISION-MAKING
• COMMUNICATION DISTORTION
CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES

- EMBODIES INEQUALITY
- PRIVILEGES MALE/MASCULINE LEADERSHIP
- BUREAUCRATIC PERSONALITY (MERTON 1940)
- SELF-SERVING BEHAVIOUR
- INCOME INEQUALITY
- ALIENATION
- SO….THIS LEAVES A GAP…
GREAT HOPE FOR WORKPLACE DEMOCRACY

• IMPROVES JOB SATISFACTION (BLACK AND GREGORSON, 1997),

• INCREASE EMPLOYEE HEALTH (FOLEY AND POLANYI, 2006),

• STIMULATE CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION (SARIN AND MCDERMOTT, 2003)

• INCREASE PRODUCTIVITY (CARMELLI, ET AL, 2008)

• FREEDOM, LIBERATION, NON-ARBITRARY INTERFERENCE

• PASSION AND PURPOSE, SOULFUL ORGANIZATIONS
HOPES FOR A NEW FORM OF ORGANIZING
TOWARDS NON (OR LESS) HIERARCHICAL ALTERNATIVES
PROBLEMS WITH ALTERNATIVE DEMOCRATIC ORGANIZING

- Economic viability
- Ineffective decision-making – freedom is an endless meeting
- Inequalities of power – persistence of hierarchy
- Oligarchization – democracy as a cage
- Apathy and low-levels of participation
- Social reproduction – employ people like us
- Challenges of adoption – rejection of democracy
CMS AND ALTERNATIVE ORGANIZING

- HISTORY OF SUPPORT FOR ALTERNATIVE ORGANIZING
- BUT TENDENCY TO CRITIQUE (ASSUMPTION OF **PURITY**)
- SAINTS VS SINNERS – (USUALLY SINNERS)
- FAILURE TO RECOGNIZE PARADOXES OF WORKING AND LEADING IN DEMOCRATIC ORGANIZATIONS
- MORE GENERALLY: TOO MUCH FOCUS ON FAILURE RATHER THAN POSSIBILITIES
- LEADING TO **PARALYSIS**
ESRC PROJECT:
A DEMOCRACY TO COME?

- BARRIERS TO BECOMING MORE DEMOCRATIC AT WORK
- POSSIBILITIES FOR OVERCOMING THESE BARRIERS
- 2016-2019 (3 YEAR PROJECT) “A DEMOCRACY TO COME? INVESTIGATING CHANGE IN ALTERNATIVE ORGANIZATIONS"
- 24 DEMOCRATIC ORGANIZATIONS – MOVING AWAY FROM TRADITIONAL TOP DOWN, STATUS DRIVEN HIERARCHY AT WORK (USA, EUROPE)
- 105 INTERVIEWS, OBSERVATIONS, ACTION RESEARCH

- ONE OF THE THEMES EXPLORED: LEADERSHIP IN DEMOCRATIC WORKPLACES
- WHAT NEW FORMS OF LEADERSHIP EMERGE LESS HIERARCHICAL ORGANIZATIONS?
- DO THESE WORKPLACES OPEN UP SPACE FOR A DIVERSITY OF LEADERSHIP STYLES?
- WHAT ISSUES PERSIST IN DEMOCRATIC WORKPLACES IN TERMS OF MORE INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP APPROACHES? (SEE RESEARCH ON GENDER AND CO-OPERATIVES)
SPECIFIC FORM OF WORKPLACE DEMOCRACY: SOCIOCRACY

• MAIN FEATURES:

1. DECISION MAKING BY CONSENT (RATHER THAN CONSENSUS – CAN I LIVE WITH THIS DECISION FOR A SET PERIOD OF TIME)

2. ORGANIZATION OF WORK IN TO CIRCULAR HIERARCHIES WHICH PEOPLE JOIN – ROTATING LEADERSHIP (BY (S)ELECTION)

3. CONTINUOUS EVOLUTION, LEARNING BY FEEDBACK (THROUGH NON-VIOLENT COMMUNICATION)

NVC AS A FORM OF COMMUNICATION THAT HELPS TO MEET PEOPLE’S NEEDS THROUGH INCREASED EMPATHY
SOCIOCRACY - A DEMOCRATISED HIERARCHY
# Sociocracy as Alternative Form of Governance

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<td>Majority decision, chair has casting</td>
<td>All high status leaders; persistence of hierarchy</td>
<td>Closed, group, lack of diversity limits opportunities for learning</td>
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<td>Consensus workplace democracy governance (Inclusive)</td>
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<td>Little or no hierarchy</td>
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THE PROMISE OF SOCIOCRACY: ECONOMIC VIABILITY

• STREAMLINING MEETINGS
  • INEFFICIENT PROCESS ULTIMATELY DISREGARD NEEDS, LIKE THE NEED TO CONTRIBUTE TO OUR CLIENTS, OUR STUDENTS, OR OUR COMMUNITY. WHAT SOCIOCRACY DOES IS TO CREATE INTEGRATION BETWEEN THE COMMITMENT TO ACTION/AGENCY/FORWARD MOTION AND THE PROMISE TO HOLD EVERYONE’S NEEDS IN CONSIDERATION AT ALL TIMES. (RAU & KOCH-GONZALEZ, 2018, P. 5)

• CONSENT RATHER THAN CONSENSUS
  • “GOOD ENOUGH FOR NOW, SAFE ENOUGH TO TRY” (BUCK & VILLINES, 2007)
  • OBJECTIONS ARE “THE BEGINNING OF THE CREATIVE PROCESS”, PROVIDING “THE PRESSURE NEEDED TO RESOLVE ISSUES” (BUCK, 2014, P. 5)

• HIGHLIGHT STRUCTURED DECISION-MAKING
THE PROMISE OF SOCIOCRAZY: INEQUALITIES OF POWER

• EQUIVALENCE

• ‘IS AN INCLUSIVE METHOD OF ORGANIZATIONAL GOVERNANCE BASED ON THE EQUIVALENCE OF ALL MEMBERS OF THE ORGANIZATION … [THAT IS] … THE EQUAL VALUING OF EACH INDIVIDUAL, IN DISTINCTION TO VALUING FOR EXAMPLE, THE MAJORITY OR THE MANAGEMENT MORE HIGHLY.’

• NO CLAIM TO REMOVE HIERARCHY AND BECOME TOTALLY FLAT – DELIBERATIVE LEADERSHIP

• CIRCULAR MEETINGS – ALL VOICES HEARD

• REFLECTION AS PART OF THE PROCESS

• GARDEN – CONTINUAL MAINTENANCE
THE PROMISE OF
SOCIOCRACY:
PARTICIPATION AND
ENGAGEMENT

• DISTRIBUTIVE LEADERSHIP
• AVOIDING “OSSIFICATION AT THE BOTTOM AND BURN-OUT AT THE TOP BY INVOLVING EVERYONE IN STEERING THE ORGANIZATION TOWARD ITS AIM” (BUCK & VILLINES, 2007, P. 93)
• CIRCLES HAVE OWN DOMAINS, SMALL AND FOCUSED
• “THE VOICES OF EVERYONE IN THE ORGANIZATION HAVE A PLACE AT THE BOARD TABLE” (BUCK, 2014, P. 5)
• DOUBLE-LINKING
PHASES OF THE PROJECT

• PHASE ONE – INTERVIEWING 30 COACHES ABOUT DEMOCRATIC TRANSITIONS

• PHASE TWO – VISITING 24 DEMOCRATIC (SO CIOCRATIC) ORGANIZATIONS, INTERVIEWING (ANALYSING THE DATA AT THE MOMENT)

• PHASE THREE – ACTION RESEARCH, DOING DEMOCRATIC ORGANIZING (A) SETTING UP THE HEALTHY POWER ALLIANCE; B) END OF PROJECT EVENT)

• USING ASPECTS OF EACH PHASE TO UNDERSTAND HOW LEADERSHIP WORKS IN ORGANIZATIONS CHALLENGING CONVENTIONAL HIERARCHY
CRITICAL METHODOLOGY: PARADOXICAL MINDSETS

• AFFIRMATIVE SCHOLARSHIP – NOT JUST LOOKING FOR FAILURE (BREAK OUT OF PARALYSIS!)
• BUT NOT BLINDLY LOOKING TO ENDORSE (OR FOR SAINTS) – ANTI-PERFORMATIVITY MOVEMENT
• THREE COMMON PARADOXES IN CMS LITERATURES (OFTEN CONSIDERED AS FAILURE).

1. DESIRING TO RELINQUISH POWER WHILST YEARNING TO MAINTAIN (HIERARCHICAL) CONTROL (KNIGHTS AND WILLMOTT, 1989)
2. DESIRING TO BE MORE COLLECTIVE/YEARNING TO TAKE CARE OF THE INDIVIDUAL
3. DESIRE FOR AUTHENTICITY WHILST YEARNING FOR EFFICIENCY OR WHATEVER WORKS

• CONSIDERED FAILURES (FALL SHORT OF PURITY) SO ENCOURAGE PARALYSIS
“TAKING THE RED PILL” — AS AN ESCAPE FROM PARALYSIS?

• ‘THAT’S ALL I’M TRYING TO DO, IS TO HELP THEM A LITTLE BIT BY BEING A BIT OF A FRIEND SOMETIMES’ (INT. 4)

• ‘SO YES, ITS LIKE GROUP THERAPY, WE ALWAYS HAVE TEARS, WE ALWAYS HAVE TEARS, WE ALWAYS HAVE LEARNING MOMENTS THAT YOU EXPECT AND YOU KNOW THAT THERE IS GOING TO BE A BREAKTHROUGH’ (INT. 23)

• “I THINK THERE NEEDS TO BE SOME LEAD-TIME, LIKE SIX MONTHS, A YEAR, BUT IF YOU ARE NOT AWARE ENOUGH AND YOU CAN’T GET THAT MESSAGE, THEN I WILL BE VERY EMPATHETIC AS I WAKE YOU UP AND GET YOU TO GET THAT MESSAGE SO THAT YOU CAN CREATE YOUR SAFETY BOAT”

• ‘BUT WHAT I FEEL IS THAT THE PEOPLE WHO REALLY GET IT, WHO REALLY SWALLOW THE RED PILL, THEY DON’T GO BACK BECAUSE IT CHANGES THEM AS A PERSONALITY.’ (INT. 25)
PARADOX ONE: DESIRING TO RELINQUISH POWER WHILST YEARNING TO MAINTAIN (HIERARCHICAL) CONTROL

SOCIOCRATIC BAKERY

- **JIM:** “THERE’S DEFINITELY A PATTERN WHICH IS PEOPLE ARRIVE AT THE CO-OP WITH THE THINGS THAT THEY LEARN FROM PUBLIC SCHOOL AND CHURCH, AND SCOUTING PERHAPS, WHICH TENDS TO HAVE A VERY OLD SCHOOL, MILITARY POWER STRUCTURE AND UNDERSTANDING OF HOW YOU RUN A THINK AS WELL. YOU FIGURE OUT WHO THE BOSS IS AND THE BOSS CALLS THE SHOTS. PEOPLE ARRIVE IT’S A CO-OP BUT THEY ARRIVE WITH THAT UNDERSTANDING. SO, IF THERE’S ANY ISSUE THAT ARISES, MOST PEOPLE IMMEDIATELY START LOOKING FOR THE TALL WHITE GUY WITH THE SHERIFF’S BADGE ON HIS SHIRT, AND THAT’S BEEN ME PRETTY MUCH.”

- **JIM:** “I WOULD END UP PLAYING SOME KIND OF SHERIFF ROLE TO TRY AND HELP LOVINGLY RESOLVE WHATEVER NEEDED RESOLUTION. SO, IT’S TAKEN ME SOME TIME TO DE-SHERIFF MYSELF… YOU HAVE TO BE THE MENTOR OR JUST THE CLARITY TOOL RATHER THAN JUST THE SHERIFF. IT’S SO EASY TO FALL BACK IN TO THAT SHERIFF ROLE.”

SOCIOCRATIC UNIVERSITY DEPARTMENT

- **KRISTOFF:** “SHE DIRECTLY SAID TO ME, SHE DIDN’T BELIEVE IN THIS. SHE ONLY BELIEVES IN AN ORGANISATION WHERE THERE IS A BOSS THAT MEANS THINGS HAVE TO HAPPEN LIKE THAT. SHE DIDN’T BELIEVE THAT PEOPLE CAN ORGANISE THEMSELVES.”

- **JULIA:** “THERE ARE DISCUSSIONS, AND DISCUSSIONS AND DISCUSSIONS…but we got nothing done. I give up…i have nothing to give…i don’t feel like i can help”

- **KRISTOFF:** “I HAVE A SECRETARY WHO HAS REALLY BLOSSOMED THROUGH THE IMPLEMENTATION, SHE HAS BEEN INVOLVING HERSELF IN STRATEGIC WORK”

- **SELMA:** “IN THE PAST IF I NEEDED TO BUY SOMETHING I WOULD ASK A MANAGER [AND GET APPROVAL]...NOW IT IS MY DECISION...I HAVE MORE POWER...I DON’T FEEL STUPID”

- **BUT**

- **KRISTOFF:** “EVERYONE WITH THE WORDS MANAGER OR LEADER IN THEIR TITLE ARE IN AN IDENTITY CRISIS”

- **JENS:** "SOMETIMES WE ARE IN LIMBO…PULLED BETWEEN THE OLD SYSTEM AND THE NEW”
PARADOX TWO: DESIRING TO BE MORE COLLECTIVE WHILST YEARNING TO TAKE CARE OF THE INDIVIDUAL

SOCIOCRATIC RETIREMENT VILLAGE

• PAMELA: “I DON’T KNOW WHAT ALL HIS ISSUES ARE, BUT HE SEEMS TO OBJECT TO LIVING IN ANY KIND OF COMMUNITY WHERE THERE ARE ANY KIND OF RULES, AND HE DOESN’T RECOGNISE THAT SOME PARAMETERS NEED TO EXIST IN ORDER FOR THERE TO BE HARMONY IN THE VILLAGE, AND YOU’LL PROBABLY HAVE HEARD THIS”

• PAMELA: “IT WAS SO PAINFUL. IT WAS SO INCREDIBLY PAINFUL. EVERYONE WANTED TO BE SO NICE, BUT WECouldn’T REALLY DO THAT, BUT WE MADE THE DECISION WE WANTED TO BE GREENER. WE WANTED AS FEW CARS AS POSSIBLE.”

SOCIOCRATIC FOOD STORE

CHARLOTTE: “MY RECENT FAVOURITE IS — SO WE’VE GOT A HEALTH AND SAFETY NOW, IN THE LAST FEW YEARS, AND THEY’VE TAKEN THE JOB REALLY SERIOUSLY, WHICH IS GOOD, AND THEY HAD AN EXTERNAL PERSON COMING TO ADVISE THEM AND ONE OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS WAS THAT WE WORE SAFETY BOOTS IN THE WAREHOUSE. (LAUGHS) SEEMS SO OBVIOUS, DOESN’T IT? BUT OH NO, NOT FOR A LOT OF PEOPLE. THIS IS WHEN REALLY THE EMPLOYER/EMPLOYEE CONFLICT REALLY STARTS AND ALL OF A SUDDEN, OH NO, IT HURTS MY FEET, IT HURTS MY KNEES. I’M GOING TO BLOCK THIS. I’M NOT GOING TO HAVE THIS. IT TOOK FOREVER. IT TOOK HOURS AND HOURS OF DISCUSSION TO FINALLY DECIDE THAT WE’RE GOING TO WEAR THOSE SAFETY BOOTS AND THAT WAS NOT REACHED BY CONSENSUS.”

Phase Two – Interviews with organizational members
Phase Two – Interviews with organizational members

**PARADOX THREE: DESIRE FOR AUTHENTICITY (AS A DEMOCRATIC ORGANIZATION) WHILST YEARNING FOR EFFICIENCY OR TO DO WHATEVER WORKS**

**SOCIOCRATIC FOOD STORE**

- **ANNA:** “WE SWAMP PEOPLE WITH INFORMATION, SO I TALKED ABOUT THIS IN YOUR WEBINAR THING AGES AGO DIDN’T I? THIS PARADOX OF OVER INFORMATION SHARING. SO IF YOU WANT PEOPLE TO BE ENGAGED, YOU WANT TO GIVE THEM THE INFORMATION TO ENGAGE WITH, IF YOU HAVE THIS THEORY THAT YOU WANT EVERYBODY TO BE IN A FLAT STRUCTURE ENGAGED WITH EVERYTHING, YOU THEN GIVE THEM EVERYTHING AND YOU BURY PEOPLE UNDER THAT WEIGHT OF INFORMATION SO THEY CAN’T ACTIVELY ENGAGE. AND THAT’S, FOR ME, BEEN THE BIGGEST PROBLEM OVER THE LAST SORT OF THREE YEARS OR SO OF DOING THIS. THAT IT ALL COMES FROM A GOOD PLACE, WE WANT EVERYBODY TO HAVE OPEN ACCESS TO EVERYTHING. BUT IF WE CAN’T BE MORE STRATEGIC WITH THE INFORMATION WE ARE SHARING, WE ARE GOING TO LIMIT PEOPLE’S PARTICIPATION, WE ARE GOING TO SWAMP THEM, DRAG THEM DOWN, JUST WADING THROUGH THE PAPERWORK.”

- **ANNA:** “I WOULD LOVE TO BE PART OF A CO-OP THAT’S 15 PEOPLE BECAUSE YOU CAN PROBABLY REALLY ARGUE STUFF OUT WHEN YOU NEED TO AND GET THINGS DONE. WHEN YOU ARE 70, YOU HAVE TO ACCEPT THAT THERE IS A WATERING DOWN IN SOME WAY OUT OF LESS UNDERSTANDING BY EVERYBODY OF EVERYTHING BECAUSE THAT’S THE INEVITABILITY OF GROWTH.”

- **POTENTIAL FOR PARALYSIS UNTIL WE SEE THE PARADOX FOR WHAT IT IS!**

- **WITHOUT THIS, WE REMAIN IN PARALYSIS.**
FROM PARALYSIS TO PARADOX - CAN WE TAKE THE RED PILL OURSELVES?

• NOT TRYING TO AVOID FEELINGS OF TENSION IN DEMOCRATIC ORGANIZING

• EMBRACING OR “LIVING THE PARADOX”

• VIGNETTE 1 - FROM PARALYSIS TO PARADOX – SETTING UP THE HEALTHY POWER ALLIANCE

• A TELEPHONE CALL BETWEEN AUTHOR 1 AND 2 TO DISCUSS SENDING OUT THE FIRST INVITE ABOUT THE HPA TO POTENTIAL INTERESTED CRITICAL ACADEMICS

VIGNETTE 2 – FROM PARALYSIS TO PARADOX – “A PUSH OVER THE EDGE”

• A ZOOM WEBINAR EXPERIENCE BETWEEN ACADEMICS AND PRACTITIONERS

Phase Three – Our experiences with democratic organizing
DEMOCRATIC LEADERS
WORKING THROUGH PARADOX

• Navigating the way through paradoxes
• Three core approaches:
  • Acceptance
  • Confronting
  • Transcending
• Lewis (2000: 764) suggest this ‘entails critically examining entrenched assumptions to construct a more accommodating perception of opposites. Critical self – and social reflection might help actors re-frame their assumptions, learn from existing tensions, and develop a more complicated repertoire of understandings and behaviours that better reflects organizational intricacies’
• Reframing assumptions as something radically “new”
TRANSCEENDING PARADOX THROUGH SOCIOCRACY?

SOCIOCRACY POLITICISES THE PARADOX – COLLECTIVIZES, RECONFIGURES IT AS SOMETHING NEW.

1. DECISION MAKING BY CONSENT

2. ORGANIZATION OF WORK IN TO CIRCULAR HIERARCHIES WHICH PEOPLE JOIN – ROTATING LEADERSHIP (BY (S)ELECTION)

3. CONTINUOUS EVOLUTION (LEARNING) BY FEEDBACK
PARADOX TO POLITICISING: “SOCIOCRACY AT WORK” EVENT

• VIGNETTE THREE – PARADOX TO POLITICISING: “SOCIOCRACY AT WORK” EVENT

• NOTTINGHAM UNIVERSITY – 15 WORKERS (FROM SOCIOCRATIC ORGANIZATIONS), 15 ACADEMICS, 15 CONSULTANTS

• PARADOXES EXPERIENCED OURSELVES BUT REACT TO THESE AND POLITICISE

• HTTPS://WWW.DEMOCRACYTOCOME.ORG/SOCIOCRACY-AT-WORK-EVENT-ONE/
SOCIOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

• AS MEANS TO:

1. POLITICISE DEMOCRATIC PARADOX

2. TRANSCEND DEMOCRATIC PARADOX

3. ACHIEVE PROGRESSIVE SOCIAL CHANGE
IN PRAISE OF (DEMOCRATIC) BUREAUCRACY

- As a means of denaturalizing hierarchy (by way of a fully democratized, socially created hierarchy)

- Weber's Iron Cage – Bureaucracy as unethical/instrumentalist rationalization of human conduct/dehumanizing (Macintyre), inflexible (Peters)

- Du Gay in Praise of Bureaucracy

- Ethical component of bureaucracy - Du Gay's pluralist liberalism (altruistic? benevolent?)

- Sociocracy as democratized bureaucracy – flexible bureaucracy

- Avoiding the "tyranny of structurelessness"

- Sets democratic leaders free through rules?
SOCIOCRACY: PERSISTENT ISSUES

• NOT A SILVER BULLET FOR DEMOCRATIZING LEADERSHIP OR MAKING HIERARCHY BEARABLE

1. HIDDEN INEQUALITIES (FOUNDERS, PERSISTENCE OF STATUS DRIVEN HIERARCHY)
2. COMPLEXITIES OF POWER (NOT LETTING GO, NOT TAKING IT ON)
3. INDIVIDUAL GOALS VS COLLECTIVE AIMS (DISRUPTION AND RESISTANCE)
4. LEARNING SOCIOCRACY (DIFFICULTIES OF PICKING UP THE RULES OF THE GAME, HISTORICAL/SOCIETAL NORMS)
5. PERSISTENT RIGIDITY AND CONSTRAINTS (BINDING RULES, KEEPING QUIET!)

SOCIOCRACY AT WORK: POSSIBILITIES AND LIMITATIONS OF AN ALTERNATIVE DEMOCRATIC MODEL OF ORGANIZATION
THANK YOU FOR LISTENING!
ANY QUESTIONS?

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