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Tomorrow's training operators and new programmes

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Abstract. This text attempts to provide new insights about the major changes that occurred in the profession of trainer. the main issue is to broaden the concept and the practice of training towards a more dynamic approach that entails the empowerment of "trainees" and their guidance towards action.

Key words. Facilitation – Participation – Empowerment – Quality – Involvement – Ownership.

Résumé. Ce texte essaie de fournir des nouvelles idées sur les changements les plus profonds qui ont eu lieu dans la formation. Le problème principal est de faire évoluer le concept et la pratique de la formation vers une approche qui prévoit l'appropriation des participants (ou des clients, si l'on veut) et leur conduction à l'action.

Mots-clés. Modération de groupes de travail – Participation – Qualité – Appropriation.

I – The new paradigm

The first thing we should do is to answer a simple question. What do we see in today's world?

We see complexity. We see a growth of technical knowledge around the world. We can say that the traditional donor-recipient scheme is no longer applicable. Scientists and researchers from the so-called developing countries contribute to the progress of the different disciplines as validly as their colleagues from the so-called industrialised countries.

In this sense, the growth of technical competence around the globe can lead us to forge the concept of collective knowledge. Through this idea we mean that to really address a problem we should gather the ideas and insights of a group of people rather than just relying upon the specific knowledge of a single expert. Such an expert may be well prepared in his/her subjects but could miss other type of information (context, culture, other subject, etc.)

Researchers and practitioners are increasingly working in networks made by individuals. They don't tend anymore to recognise an authority among them or coming from outside. The flow of communication is no longer hierarchical but horizontal.

And what do we see in companies?

We see an emphasis on "excellence". This is due to the competition for the greatest market share. Organisations in search of excellence compete for the best personal by offering superior working environments. In order to attract and hold high quality employees, companies are investing more in their employees and their working environments.

We see a change in the workforce. A younger and better-educated workforce holds a new set of values. These are related to interest in their job, working with people who listen to their ideas, getting to do something for themselves instead of just following orders and also seeing the results of their work.

We see that successful companies have informal or lateral lines communication, rather than vertical, hierarchical channels.

Teamwork is another common feature of responsible organisations.

Therefore, if we want to accompany and foster the tendencies observable in a world-wide scale, we may say that the role of the trainer will increasingly shift towards that of a facilitator, able to elicit other people's knowledge and structure it in a meaningful way.

The role of the trainer will increasingly be less devoted to the simple transfer of know-how and more related to initiating participatory process so that the actors are the owners of the change. Of course, there wills always be a certain demand of technical training but it will be possible to fulfil this request with subject specialists, activated *ad hoc* by the training manager.

Thus, the future trainer should be able to manage a complex changing process by inverting the classical "expert approach" through which the consultant or the trainer provides answers and solutions. To make the changing process really effective, he/she will have to elicit the knowledge of his/her, say, clients in such a way that the change is owned by clients themselves. Clients, nowadays, want to participate actively in the process, by providing knowledge and by identifying solutions.

The most successful organisations in today's demanding marketplace and changing environment are characterised by a management style that stresses (Spencer, 1989):

❏ flexibility and responsiveness to change,

❏ innovative thinking,

❏ informal communication,

❏ continuing education and learning,

❏ visionary leadership and emphasis on quality.

But there is another factor, one that links all of these values together into what most experts see as the management style of the future. Its called "participation", or "participative management".

Participation is the right way to quality.

II – The trainer as a process consultant

If we established that the role of the trainer is to manage a changing process, it appears evident that his/her professional profile looks more like a consultant/facilitator rather than like a teacher. To this regard, it's necessary to quote the principle of process consultation (Schein, 1984).

Consultants who earn their living by giving advice (assistance) to their clients face many problems in doing their work effectively: we know that many consultants' reports lie unused in the bottom drawers of the people they're trying to help. At this point, let's think of the different models of consultation that can be used.

One model is the "Purchase of Information". In this case the buyer defines his needs or the need of his/her organisation, and concluding that the resources and time required to fill that need are not available, searches for a consultant to provide the information or service. The likelihood that the "Purchase of Information" model will work depends on whether the "buyer" has correctly diagnosed his own needs, correctly communicated these to his consultant, accurately assessed the capability of the consultant to provide the information or service and thought through the consequences of having the consultant gather such information or implement the changes. Very often, one or more of these pre-suppositions is not

true: for instance, the "client" does not exactly what the problems are or what should be done to solve them. He/she only knows that there is a problem.

Another model can be described as "Doctor-Patient". This model is the most common in the world of consultants. The basic idea here is that the consultant is brought into the organisation like a doctor to "check it out", usually because there are symptoms of organisational ill health. The consultant diagnoses what is causing these symptoms and recommends a programme of therapy or prescribes remedial measures. This model assumes that the consultant is able to diagnose (usually on his/her own) what is going wrong in the organisation although there are evidently many reasons why people are unlikely to reveal what is actually going on (they do not know, they have partisan or limited perspectives, they do no trust the consultant, or use the opportunity to settle old scores or to complain). Even if the process of diagnosis is successful, the "patient" often refuses to believe that the consultant has diagnosed the real problems correctly and therefore will not follow the prescribed remedies (especially if this would be difficult).

In both cases, assisting other people with their problems fails because the process of understanding, diagnosing and defining remedial action is taken out of the hands of the people who have the problem. "Ownership" passes from the client asking for help to the consultant offering the help. And often, even if the consultant's recommendations are followed up, there remains the risk that if these fail, it is the consultant who will carry the blame (even thought it is the client who has the real "ownership" of the problem).

Schein (1984) proposes a third approach, Process consultation, to reduce the danger of failure that the first two approaches involve. In process consultations:

❏ Diagnosis is a joint effort to find the root causes of the problems faced;
❏ The strengths and weaknesses of the present situation are explored by the consultant and client alike;
❏ The client is assisted to make the diagnosis him/herself and to develop a valid plan of action; the consultant therefore helps the client to improve his/her diagnostic and problem-solving capabilities;
❏ The client is assisted to carry out this plan of action, but it's the client who implements the action not the consultant.

A key presupposition in process consultation is that the client must learn to see the problem for himself by sharing in the diagnostic process and be actively involved in determining the remedy. The consultant's role is to help sharpen the diagnosis and provide suggestions for alternative remedies, which the client may not have thought of. In fact, in this way the consultant can "teach" the client to diagnose and remedy situations better. It leads to more permanent solutions to problems.

The process consultant may or may not be an expert at solving the particular problem that is uncovered. But more relevant than the expertise of the consultant is his/her skill in helping the client to diagnose problems and choose remedial courses of action. In this sense, the process consultant is primarily methodologically active as a facilitator.

It is therefore not sufficient to respond to a request for help with a project design by repairing the mistakes in the plan oneself. Instead one should aim at entering a dialogue with the "clients" to help them improve their own analysis.

III – The new programmes

According to this new perspective, what are the more appropriate programmes?

It is evident that we have to provide present trainers with powerful transversal personal skills. Hence, train-the-trainers programmes should be established.

These programmes should enhance the following skills of trainers:

❏ Hold meaningful and dynamic interpersonal relations;
❏ Listen to what other people say;
❏ Help organisations to analyse problems;
❏ Work in networks of colleagues;
❏ Capacity to assist a group to set objectives and to define actions plans.

Apart from train-the-trainers programmes, training programmes for the Mediterranean should present the following features:

❏ Being part of an integrated intervention, given the fact that training as such is hardly a way to solve problems; this remark stems from the failure of training programmes in Europe to solve a problem like unemployment; experience has shown that if an integrated approach covering also the other aspects related to the problem is not followed, training alone is not effective;

❏ Allowing participants to networking ; this is related both to the diffusion of communication facilities and to the already mentioned new horizontal approach emerging in organisations in a world-wide scale;

❏ Aimed at covering specific training needs, especially at a postgraduate level;

❏ Being based on sound problem analysis at a local level;

❏ Being based on a partnership approach rather than being designed and implemented mostly by the donor countries.

In this sense, training is not anymore just a transfer of technical knowledge but a tool for development.

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