New organising in Swedish third sector organisations

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ABSTRACT
This article reports on an investigation among Swedish third sector organisations. Secretaries general or the equivalent have been interviewed concerning their views on challenges and developments in organising. The most prominent feature is the movement towards forms that complement a traditional hierarchy, the traditional form of most of the organisations. Different forms of networking, increased transparency, decentralisation and the use of modern information and communication technology are under way in many of the organisations.

On the one hand, this may seem natural in light of developments in other parts of society. On the other hand, it represents a shift in the organisation of third sector organisations – away from the organised, controllable and providing a clear overview, towards the amorphous, the fuzzy and the difficult to define and overview. If it works, it can result in more productive activity in the organisations, in greater community spirit, and in a greater sharing of the workload in the organisation. However, there is a risk of unclear division of responsibility, of "unauthorised" ventures and greater diversity in goals pursued, and in a greater turnover of active members, threatening the continuity of operations and ventures.

Keywords: *Third sector, Organisational learning, Organising, Not-for-profits, Volunteers*

Introduction

In Sweden, "the third sector" is normally referred to as *ideella organisationer*, idealistic organisations, but with a connotation of work performed for a good cause, not for monetary gain or even remuneration. This third sector includes NGOs, such as the Red Cross, Save the Children and Amnesty. It includes membership organisations focusing the members' physical activity, such as the association for outdoor sports, the sports associations; their spiritual life, such as religious organisations; their arts and culture activities, such as choirs, orchestras, theatre groups. It includes the adult education associations, while schools and universities are typically part of the public sector. It includes fundraising organisations financing research, such as the Cancer foundation. It includes labour unions, professional organisations, employers associations and political parties. It includes some healthcare organisations, although the majority of healthcare is part of the public sector.

As can be seen from this list, which is not exhaustive, the group is highly diverse. It can not be defined by the focus of activities, as they range from those that can also be found in the public sector to those that can be found in the private sector. Nor can it be defined by size, as some are large, encompassing up to a third of the Swedish population, while others are small. The "contract" between the organisation and those who perform the activities also varies greatly. Some rely almost exclusively on remunerated work, while others base their operation to a large extent, or even exclusively, on the unpaid efforts of members. However, for all, the primary goal is something else than to make money. To be sure, for some, raising money for a specific cause is the primary objective and for others an important part of the organisation's activities, but the end goal is not money in itself but the activities it should support – research, relief or humanitarian work, ecological preservation, political activity, the members' physical or mental activity, or social contacts and enjoyment.

Despite the diversity, the idealistic organisations are often considered to be a group – the third sector – by politicians, managers and individuals in all walks of life. There are also attempts among idealistic organisations to form collaboration across the diverse spectrum. *Ideell arena* is such an attempt. Starting almost ten years ago, this organisation has tried to create meeting places and fora for the exchange and development of knowledge and competence, particularly concerning leadership. The present almost 60 member organisations mirror the diversity of the third sector, and seem to find the mix of similarities and diversity rewarding.

To help guide the efforts of the organisation Ideell arena, a round of interviews was carried out in the membership organisations in 2005 with the secretary general, managing director or equivalent concerning how they viewed the past, the present and the challenges for the future. The material was analysed, presented and discussed at workshops and other occasions with top managers and chairpersons of the member organisations.

This article is a separate analysis of the material, focusing views on organising expressed by the interviewees. It has been carried out by a researcher who participated in the original study. The purpose of the article is to identify ideas expressed in the interviews that represent intentional attempts at affecting organising practice or emergent changes, and analyse them in light of organisational theory.

Theoretical views on modern organising and knowledge develoment

Change and sensemaking

Tsoukas and Chia (2002) state that "change is the reweaving of actors' webs of beliefs and habits of action as a result of new experiences obtained through interactions (p. 570)". In this article, I look at change through the "web of beliefs" of top managers in Swedish third sector organisations. Their (changing) web of beliefs and their ideas of reweaving of habits of action are, I assume, shaped by the new – and old – experiences they have obtained through interaction with others inside and outside their organisations. This is in line with Weick's idea that sensemaking starts with surprises, and that it is the role of leaders in organisations to be authors, weaving credible stories of what is happening and of what would be sensible reactions to these developments (Weick 1995). Neither the sensemaking nor the narration is, according to Weick, the result of the leader's isolated thinking. A highly important part of sensemaking takes place in interaction with others – "meetings make sense". Weick goes on to suggest that to support the important sensemaking in an organisation, meetings where sensemaking takes place, and opportunities for shared experiences, which can form the basis for further sensemaking, are important. A further reason for meeting and co-experiencing can be found in the actions of the human mind. In the void, the absence of input, we can create demons, stories of conspiracies, and the like. This has been noted and used by artists. In an analysis of music in Hitchcock films, Fink (2006) found that increasingly during his career, Hitchcock let the music develop into silence to increase the feeling of tension and suspense in scenes that were intended to be frightening. Our imagination is good at making bad things even worse. As part of positive organising, it can then make sense to encounter and interact with the foreign and threatening rather than just fantasise about it.

Organising and the social construction of knowledge

The idea of social construction of knowledge as something natural, good, and worth nurturing, can also be found in knowledge management literature. Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) suggested that knowledge development to a large extent is a social process, rather than the result of isolated efforts by individuals. The SECI model (Socialisation, Externalisation, Combination and Internalisation, ibid, p. 72) described different modes of knowledge development and knowledge transfer, where social interaction is a key ingredient. Wordless transfer through co-experiencing and doing things together (socialisation) is complemented by deliberate attempts to put thoughts and feelings into words or images (externalisation) to facilitate sharing, and putting pieces together in new and meaningful ways (combination). Nonaka and Toyama (2003) strongly stressed how knowledge evolution moves through these stages in a never-ending spiral. However, for the process to work well, people need to interact in a setting that supports the exchange and knowledge creation – a *ba*. A good ba needs participants with different viewpoints to fuel a creative dialogue, and a shared context to make interacting with each other meaningful. The ba thus needs boundaries to create the shared context and concentrate the interaction. Developing a shared frame of reference that makes communication possible within a group is termed perspective making by Boland and Tenkasi (1995). It is described as a language game where the rules of the game are made up along the way by the participants. The shared perspective is the basis for knowledge work. Yet, according to Nonaka and Toyama, the boundaries need to be open to allow people to enter and leave, to provide continued dynamism and evolution.

The need for boundaries to create a fruitful basis for dialogue is emphasised by Newell, Pan, Galliers and Huang (2001) and Pan and Leidner (2003), who show how attempts to create boundaryless communication foundered. They demonstrated a need for both destroying *and creating* boundaries to achieve useful communication. Breaking down boundaries could help bring together different viewpoints and experiences. Creating boundaries was important to create a sense of security and of shared meaning needed to make communication important enough to risk engaging in it. Furthermore, they found the need for a network coordinator, facilitating contacts and moderating and disciplining uncollegial communication. Without it, the fruitful dialogue did not really spread and develop.

Why communicate? Daft and Lengel (1986) contend that it is what you do in organisations, and you do it to resolve uncertainty and equivocality. Uncertainty is resolved by finding the correct answer to a well-defined question. Equivocality is more a question of defining questions worth asking. To resolve equivocality, opportunities for rich communication are needed, preferably involving all the people concerned by the issue. This resembles the perspective making discussed by Boland and Tenkasi (1995). But what if people are not driven to communicate by working in an organisation where they are jointly trying to achieve set goals? McLure Wasko and Faraj (2000), investigating electronic communities of practice, found a sense of duty among participants. If the topic that has caused the community to form is important enough to you, helping others, answering their questions or engaging in discussion with them "is what one does". It does not have to be remunerated or based on a strict mutuality. The exchange could even be damaged by introducing incentives. Others would agree that voluntary contributions to knowledge exchange and development would be preferable to instrumental participation, based on direct incentives, although direct incentives can be needed to get a community started (e.g. Davenport and Prusak 1996).

However, it is conceivable that a voluntary exchange in a community of practice or a ba, just like the operation of a voluntary organisation, builds on very uneven distribution of input from different members. A modern form of jointly created pools of knowledge where the individual contributions can be easily assessed is Wikis – the co-authored encyclopaedias of general or more specific scope that are nowadays being created on the Web. Gaved, Heath and Eisenstadt (2006), investigating Open Guides – Wikis providing all sorts of information about a geographical place, such as Milton Keynes or Boston – found that although the contributors could number in the thousands, typically the majority of the content – and the upkeep – was provided by a handful of dedicated idealist. When I checked the corresponding figures for Wikipedia[1], the log statistics showed that less than 0.3 per cent of the more than 600,000 contributors have contributed with over half the total number of edits (the total being over 40 million). 25% of the contributors accounted for 96% of the total. Thus, 75% of the authors are peripheral contributors, but contributors nonetheless, and making Wikipedia one of the great collective movements of our time. Gaved et al. found that the central contributors in Open Guide ventures felt obligated to continue and contribute far over and above their initial intentions to keep "their" Open guides going. And if they stopped, it was highly likely that the Open guide would lose its momentum and die. It is not unreasonable to assume that the same holds true for many idealistic organisations.

Organising, producing and socialising

Why then organise? Although probably often important, it is not obvious that people affiliate themselves with an organisation, or even take up office as functionaries, due to a strong wish to contribute to the organisational goals. Maffesoli (1988, 1996) sees a human need for togetherness and belonging as a driver in contemporary society. "Religion" as a concept based on *religare* – binding together – is fundamental to people, he claims. This interest in relating and contact rather than production would then account for the formation of more or less permanent groupings, "tribes", that can be observed. Relating to others is central to our understanding of ourselves and our sense of identity. "Gain is secondary; it is not even sure that success is desirable since it risks draining the warmth out of being-together." (Ibid, p 98) If this carries some truth, then perhaps a strongly goal-focused view, such as can be expected among top managers, is

[1] I am indebted to Erik Zachte for helping me find the statistics pages.

not representative for a majority of the members or affiliated people. In addition, the breaking down of borders and relating to those outside the "tribe" puts identity at risk. If the delimitation of an in-group creates a sense of identity, the weakening of the borders between in-group and others reduces the sense of identity, identification with the organisation, and possibly the commitment to work for the organisation.

Another researcher who is critical to a too strong goal focus, but for other reasons, is Christensen (2007). He proposes that the present-day focus on best practices leads to a too restricted view of knowledge. Instead, four types of knowledge are of relevance to competent operation in an organisation: professional knowledge, coordinating knowledge, object-based knowledge (knowledge concerning the individual task or service that is produced, or the customer that is being served) and know-who (knowledge enabling the identification of who might be able to help solve specific problems). Connecting these ideas with the previous discussion of boundaries and boundary-spanning contacts, one may note that know-who extending to those outside the more limited group can be important, especially in creating a capacity for dealing with situations that are new to the more tightly knit group or community. But such boundary spanning could also be controversial.

Communication and technical mediation

Yet an angle on contacts, networking and knowledge exchange is provided by communication researchers studying the conditions for fruitful communication. What does it take to properly transfer an idea from one person to another? For example, Ngwenyama and Lee (1997) criticise models postulating that the important source of error lies in the communication medium used, and that a specific medium, like email or a personal meeting face to face, would have a specific richness that could be matched with the needs of the communication situation. Instead, they note that to a considerable extent communication consists of acts of interpretation, including your own circumstances, your views and knowledge of your counterpart, your thoughts about the counterpart's intentions and the general setting of the communication. Not only does this mean that an intended message can be understood, only partly understood, or interpreted to mean something else than the sender intended. It also means that the receiver will try to determine the veracity and validity of the statement and potential attempts from the sender to influence or manipulate the receiver. Ngwenyama and Lee suggest that the evaluation encompasses a more or less conscious and thorough assessment of completeness, truthfulness, sincerity, clarity, comprehensibility, contextuality, appropriateness, efficiency and effectiveness. How well a medium, such as telephone, email or web pages, will serve such a communication is not objectively given by the medium, it will depend on the users' familiarity with the medium and with each other. Thus, attempting to extend or support a network or a community through the use of information and communication technology mediation is not straightforward, but raises a host of complications along with its possibilities.

Organising and perspectives

Returning to the question of the work performed, Suchman (1995) emphasises that it is difficult, if at all possible, to describe the content of someone's work or of a business process involving several people. The person performing a task may not be aware of all aspects. Neither will an outsider studying someone else's work be able to fully comprehend and describe it. Each description is based on the values the describer embraces and will highlight some aspects and overlook others. Jobs performed at a distance from someone evaluating it will, especially if it is not considered to be a high status job, be judged as less complex than it actually is. Thus, conscious attempts at bringing different people together and discussing both descriptions and underlying values will be needed to get a fairly full understanding of a job. This idea of different perspectives based on different sets of values is also central to management of change, from Machiavelli (1513, 1991), up to Checkland and Scholes (1990) and beyond.

Taking the idea of different perspectives to the level of the organisation, the idea of one, uniform organisation, with everyone working towards a common goal, seems questionable. In organisational science, multiple organisational identities are attracting increased attention (e.g. Fiol and O'Connor 2002; Pratt and Foreman 2000; Foreman and Whetten 2002). A co-op, for example, can be viewed as both a "family" and as a vehicle for economic efficiency by its members (Foreman and Whetten 2002). Such

different views of organisational identities can coexist across an organisation (be holographic, as in the case of the co-op), or be particular to a group or even single individuals (be ideographic). In the ideographic case, when different people hold different conceptions of the organisational identity (or identities), they will come to different interpretations of the change alternative, and thus the change initiative will meet a variety of receptions (Checkland and Scholes 1990; Pratt and Foreman 2000). Regarding a proposed knowledge network or new forms of meeting, for example, people's responses will depend on how they believe the initiatives match the identity or identities they believe the organisation has (or should have).

Perhaps multiple identities are even more pronounced in third sector organisations than in other organisations. Some coexist within a part of the organisation, or even across the entire organisation, some are specific to certain sub-organisations, types of role holders or some other grouping (Westelius 2006). People belonging to the organisation can be expected to react strongly against a change that they believe clashes with organisational identities that they cherish, or when a measure to strengthen an identity they want to strengthen fails to be adopted in the hoped for way (Fiol and O'Connor 2002). Pratt and Foreman (2000) suggest that managers in an organisation need to manage the number of identities (Identity plurality) and the compatibility (Identity synergy) of the identities that exist within an organisation. High plurality and low synergy can be valuable when facing diversity or to cope with a changing environment, but these are also associated with costs. One means of attempting to reduce plurality and increase synergy is to create mediatory myths: stories and images of organisational identity that show existing identities to be compatible. Another method is to devise meta-identities identifying traits existing across identities and thus to promote the idea of compatibility.

Given that multiple ideographic identities exist, and will continue to do so, in an organisation where someone wants to introduce change, there are different paths the initiator of change can follow. Checkland and Scholes (1990) and Suchman (1995) suggest that for someone attempting to introduce a change initiative, it is important to negotiate and compromise at the design phase in order to achieve a change that is socially acceptable. The proposed change should be designed in such a way that it is meaningful according to the different worldviews held by those who will be affected by the change. Pratt and Foreman (2000) hold the same basic belief that change must be compatible with values that those affected cherish and thus they suggest the path of multivocality. Using multivocality is to formulate actions in such a way that they are open to many different interpretations, and can thus be accepted by people with differing views of the organisational identity.

Hedberg et al. (1994), talking about the central imaginator trying to build an imaginary organisation (a virtual organisation), and Tyrstrup (2002), exploring the roles managers fill in organisations, building on Weick's (1995) concept sensemaking, view the leaders' perhaps most central task as assigning meaning to what goes on, and to promote their version of how to interpret the present and the future. But, as concluded by Westelius (2006, p34), it is important to remember that ultimately, power over the outcomes rests with those who are to adopt an innovation, not with those who try to promote and spread it, and to not presume a holographic organisational identity. Thus, it is central for a leader or manager to be attentive to others' perspectives and try to identify the idiographic organisational identities that can probably be discerned.

Methodology

52 interviews were carried out in the Ideell Arena membership organisations in 2005 with the secretary general, managing director or equivalent, top, salaried organisational leader. Six interviewers did a number of interviews each. All interviewers had considerable practical experience from the third sector. The present author performed 17 interviews. The interviews were semi structured, focusing how the interviewees viewed the past, the present and the challenges for the future. Typically, the interviews started with the question "why does the organisation exist?", typically generating a discussion on the past and the present. The other main questions were "Where are you headed?"; "Why are you headed there?"; Which are the main challenges along the road"; and "What is the most important to succeed with in order

to get there?". Interviews typically lasted around 90 minutes, with some reaching two hours and a few lasting about an hour.

Save for a few technical mishaps, the interviews were recorded (tape recorder or digital recorder) to allow for relistenings. The interviewers also took notes during the interviews. The interviewees were guaranteed anonymity.

An introductory, empirically grounded analysis (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) was performed in collaborative fashion involving researchers and third sector practitioners (cf. Pettigrew 2003). The interviewees met for a couple of workshops, each in turn presenting themes emerging from their interviews, and discussing if these themes also appeared in the interviews performed by others. Based on these discussions, the two interviewers who had performed the largest number of interviews, one a researcher, the other an academically interested practitioner from the third sector, continued and summarised the grounded analysis in a working paper, focusing findings they believed to be controversial and thought-provoking to third sector leaders. During its writing, the paper was circulated to the other interviewers for comments a number of times. This working paper was then distributed to the chairpersons and top managers in the participating organisations and discussed at a seminar. The seminar confirmed the assumption that the findings were controversial and thought-provoking. It also highlighted the point (previously discussed among the interviewers) that somewhat different findings would have emerged if the interviews had centred on chairpersons and board members or on operative level functionaries – or, indeed, on members. The views on the past, the present and the future could be expected to differ due to people's role in organisations – as well as due to individual differences. The idea of similarities and differences in views is supported by empirical research by Dent (1991), who found 'clusters' of perspectives that differed according to functional role and hierarchical position (as well as over time). Thus, it should be kept in mind that the interviews forming the basis for this article represent views held by top, salaried leaders in these organisations. For example, this means that they are full-time managers in these organisations, they mainly get a head office view of the organisation, and employed staff is their concern.

Still, given these limitations, the interview material appeared rich and interesting enough to warrant further analysis. I have relistened to my own interviews and to four interviews performed by two other interviewers, searching for surprises and interesting points in a grounded theory manner, sorting them into themes. Part of the background for this analysis has been the previous collaborative analysis of the entire material, and the seminar. However, it has neither been specifically guided by, nor restricted to themes emerging in that round of analyses. I have also, inspired mainly by organisational theory literature, searched the interviews for points relating to themes like organisational identities, learning, organising and organisational change. These different analysis attempts have resulted in a number of emerging themes – and some leads that turned out not to hold up to further investigation. At three points in time, I have summarised and discussed findings and ideas with third sector practitioners – at an Ideell arena board meeting, at a board member workshop with a dozen participants, and at a leadership seminar with 50 participants from different organisational levels. These discussions have contributed to defining what can be considered practically interesting findings and theoretically inspired analyses that make sense to these practitioners. This article presents an analysis of interview statements related to realised or envisaged changes in organising.

Results

In this section, I present ideas expressed in the interviews that represent intentional attempts at affecting organising practice or emergent changes. The ideas are sorted under the headings *Ways of meeting – breaking the mould*; *Use of IT to meet organisational challenges*; *Increasing transparency to strengthen the organisation*; *Turning the pyramid upside down*; *Fast move into and out of office, rather than slow progression along a career path*; *Pooling and topical specialisation rather than geographically and organisationally dedicated resources*; and *Dynamic networks and communities of interest instead of geographical organisation*.

Ways of meeting – breaking the mould

In an organisation, practices develop concerning who meets who, and who communicates with who concerning what, which perhaps serve the past and present needs, but can hamper change. In a number of organisations, top managers where concerned with finding ways of breaking the mould.

Within one organisation, much attention the past few years has been directed at finding (new) ways of meeting each other. Special focus has been placed on meetings between members and functionaries. These *meeting spaces* have not just been in traditional organisational settings. One example is the organisation of bus trips – to IKEA (large furniture stores) or sport events like *Tjejmilen*, a long distance jog for women, drawing thousands of participants and having the air of a festive event including spectators and friends as well as the runners. On these trips, the participants discuss politics, work-related issues, etc. The informal atmosphere related with a social event, and the seclusion from the outside world, combined to provide a fruitful atmosphere for mutual communication and co-construction of views among the participants.

Another example is the use of IT to change old communication patterns and establish a basis for non-hierarchical communication. During the general assembly, the multi-day gathering held with an interval of a couple of years, where the policy is set for the coming period, topical discussions were held via chat rooms. The idea behind this was that everyone should be at "the same level"; not even the chairperson should be privileged or have a special standing or status.

Concerning the organisational structure, the idea promoted by the president was that transparency is of primary importance. The structure should be simple, and possible to change when needed. However, reorganising is not an end in itself or a primary tool for generating action or invigorating work on prioritised topics. The starting point should be the new topics needing attention, not the organisational structure. What can be achieved concerning these new topics in the existing structure? People need structure for comfort and security. The president held the opinion that reorganisation is (too) often instigated by and for top managers, to show action, rather than because it is strictly needed to achieve organisational goals. If reorganising is really needed, it will start happening more or less spontaneously. Networks crossing traditional geographic and hierarchical structures should be used to a greater extent. Uniformity across the country is not important.

In another organisation, a federation, the set of participating organisations had been largely stable for decades. Now, given considerable immigration and other changes, new organisations with similar goals but with members who at first sight were not similar to the members of the traditional organisations, were appearing. These organisations could reasonably become members of the federation, and started to be affiliated as *cooperating organisations*. However, the present members were not yet willing to extend membership to these new organisations, and they in turn were not all eager to become members. Sensing insecurity and a lack of trust, the secretary general introduced a set of meetings with chairpersons, secretaries general and some top functionaries from each of the member and cooperating organisations. These meetings were of discussion, not decision character, and contained large portions of informal activity. One of the member organisations acted *primus motor* in organising similar meetings at a local level. At both central and local level, the meetings have started to serve their purpose. The participants are getting to know each other and realise that the others are not dangerous, that it is possible to communicate and that the overarching goals are sufficiently similar to warrant closer contact and cooperation.

Use of IT to meet organisational challenges

Not all organisations are actively using the organisational possibilities offered by modern IT. Some do, but do not consider it as central enough to bring up in the discussions concerning strategically important traits and challenges. However, for some top managers, the use of IT is at the top of their mind. One example was given above, concerning breaking set patterns of communication. Here are some other examples.

In one federation, the largest single venture that they have undertaken, and that is being introduced, is the development of a web-based standard package for administrative work in the member organisations. The intention has been to facilitate work for employees and unpaid functionaries, partly by web-enabled member self service. The strategic importance lies both in the provision of cost-efficient solutions to member organisations – one of the tasks of the federation – and in potentially easing the administrative burden in the member organisations. Although the organisations and the activities they organise are popular, recruiting functionaries is not easy. One of the aspects making people think twice before accepting requests to become functionaries is the time spent on administrative tasks. If the IT application meets the expectations, being a functionary could become less time-consuming in future because administrative tasks can be distributed among a larger number of people, or even transferred from functionaries to the members.

In another organisation, the chairperson views the organisation's web pages as central to organisational communication. The main advantage is the reduction of lead time in one-to-many communication. However, for organisational as well as technical reasons, individual members do not yet have the possibility to post entries themselves; they have to use an employee as mediator. The web is used both to inform the members of the prioritised goals decided on by the general assembly, of organisational activity, large and small, and of developments in legislation and practice of importance to members. The organisational magazine that used to be a monthly is now a bi-monthly. Printed matter and letters are, in combination with the telephone, still important parts of organisational communication. But there is room for improvement. A new communication strategy is being developed, and the chairperson believes that modern IT will play an ever greater part in tying the organisation together and in facilitating a transition towards a more flexible and member-activity-based from the present, more employee-and-functionary-based operation.

In yet a federative organisation, the web has already started to play a role in developing new organisational forms. Instead of challenging the traditional, geographically based organisation, a web organised according to type of activity has been introduced. (It is still possible to access the web pages of the traditional organisational units, but the database of organisational activities allows the selection of a type of activity right across the organisational boundaries.) In some types of activities, this web quickly became the new standard for activity postings, and contacts across organisational boundaries increased. In other activities, little happened. Now, encouraged by the newly designed organisational role *spider*, a networking facilitator role, network organising, cross boundary contacts, cooperation and learning are increasing.

In a number of organisations, the ambition is to encourage members to play a more active role. In one organisation, with experts at a central office offering counselling services to the members, a new initiative is to help members get in contact with each other to share experiences and help and support each other. On the web, members can now use the "closest neighbour" function to find out who the other members with the same ZIP code are.

Increasing transparency to strengthen the organisation

Third sector operations does not necessarily mean that everyone is equally well informed, or even has the possibility of informing themselves on what goes on in the organisation. As mentioned above, the organisational structure could be designed with an eye to the possibility it offers people at different levels to overview and grasp it. IT can also be used to structure and facilitate communication across organisational boundaries. However, the idea of transparency can even be taken further, stressing a policy of openness and "no secrets".

In one organisation, there has been a move from a board of directors directing and controlling everyday activities, towards a more autonomous managing director role, where the managing director takes initiatives and actively directs the organisation, as long as the activities are in line with the overall policy set by the board. To manage the transition to this more professionalized operation, "full transparency" has been introduced. The top manager regularly assembles reports on goals and activities, and evaluation of

developments and achievements. Both these reports and the board minutes are available to everyone – the board as well as the employees and functionaries. If anyone is interested in the bases for the reports, these are also made available. This is a drastic change compared with the old regime, when even board minutes were secret. With this transparency in place, the board can monitor the development, and feel that the manager is in control. It also aids the coordination between departments and counteracts feelings of being left out or not being informed of interesting – or threatening – developments. However, the transparency can be demanding, as those who cause or fail to manage problems also become visible.

Turning the pyramid upside down

A number of interviewees considered that their organisation had become too organised, relying too much on initiative from the top of the pyramid, or even restricting initiatives from the roots. The vignettes below exemplify these concerns and some of the ideas on how to redress the balance.

In an organisation aiding and furthering its members' case in society and everyday life, the president claimed that the most important task was to make it easier for members to participate and act in organisational ventures that interest them. The established order has been that when issues have been identified at the central level, head office employees have formulated and attempted to spread the issues to local levels. Gaining support and enthusiasm at local level has then been difficult. The issues initiated by the central level have often been experienced as additions over and above the issues that feel important at the local unit. And the local unit functionaries have identified and assigned the issue to some local member. This requires that the local functionaries know which members are interested in which issues, and ready to work towards solving or furthering them.

The new attempt is to capture and channel single issue enthusiasm, previously viewed as a problem. The dominant view in this, as in many other third sector organisations, has been that a good member *ought* to feel commitment and be willing to contribute to all the issues pursued by the organisation. Single issue enthusiasm is only temporary and does not signal true interest in the organisation. The emerging view is that the organisation exists for the members, not the other way round. Single issue enthusiasm can, if channelled and turned into committed work for that issue, help contribute to the organisation's work, be satisfying for the enthusiastic member, and benefit other members. One attempt at achieving this increased member activity is to build networks organised around the themes judged as central by the general assembly. If a member in a community is interested in labour market policy, for example, this could very well be unknown to the local board and functionaries. The new networks should make themselves visible to the members and solicit contacts. The interested member should then know where to turn, provided that his or her interest is represented by a network. This could both help channel member enthusiasm and energy, and decrease the alienation that has started to build. In the relatively recent past, when the organisation was affluent, an organisation of employees was developed to serve the members and do things for them. The secretary general believes that this to some extent has reached a level where the employees also further causes not experienced as particularly important by the members. Now, when funding is decreasing, it has shown difficult, at least during the transition to a new organisational regime, to find ways of getting the members to become engaged and to conduct activities they find meaningful.

Fast move into and out of office, rather than slow progression along a career path

A related topic is finding ways of handling more temporary commitment, or interest delimited in time. Many organisations are built on an assumption of continuity; not only is the organisation a going concern rather than a temporary organisation, but the expectation is that members and functionaries are also enlisted for long – or for good, even. Perhaps this ideal was more in step with yesterday's society, perhaps it is more compatible with a young organisation than with a mature and aging one. The causes are debated, but people in many organisations share the feeling that it is becoming increasingly difficult to recruit and keep functionaries. Several interviewees also expressed views along the lines of "today's youths are not content to mature into the organisation over a period of, say, eight years, before taking a responsible position and contributing". One general manager was working on finding ways to promote quick entry into – and likewise quick but orderly exit from – responsible functionary positions.

However, quick entry can clash with established norms. In an organisation aimed at youths, it created a stir when some top posts were filled with people who had yet to turn 30. Over time, the organisation had built up a culture where entry into the top positions capped a long career of successively more senior post, up to the point when high age had become a prerequisite for organisational seniority. It took time before people began to trust that the young senior leaders could fill their positions well. Time will tell if these young leaders will age on their posts. But the secretary general in that organisation held the view that the people approaching retirement had come to view their organisational positions as a basic and important part of their lives. The young generation, on the other hand, was to be viewed as no more than a loan. They are here just now, but an intensive now. They come in quickly and passionately, seeing an enormous potential in the organisation. Some also quickly become very frustrated, finding set ways in the organisation hindering them from doing what they want to do or accomplishing what they wish to accomplish.

In another organisation, the secretary general remarked that each year they give insignia to a large number of functionaries who have been active in the organisation for 50 years. The secretary general doubted that this would still be the case in 50 years. It used to be that the leaders were the same, but new children came and filled the places left by older children. Now, it would be inconceivable to maintain operations unless children's parents would step in and act leaders while their young children were active. The more permanent leaders, who have taken time to train for their leadership, handle more mature age groups. The challenge this poses for the organisation is on the one hand to find ways of instilling important organisational values, like respect for wide participation above top achievement, and for broad aspects of diversity – the furthering of so far less represented groups. On the other hand, there is a greater demand for teaching the parents the rules and workings of the activities; leadership skills as such they have typically acquired in their respective occupations. The traditional leaders, having "grown up" in the organisation, typically know the activities very well, but have a greater need for leadership training.

In another organisation, the secretary general commented the recruitment of more temporary leaders: "there is a risk that we compromise certain values. For example, the focus on youths' activities risks being replaced with activities *for* youths." More temporary leaders tend to focus organising the activities at the expense of the, in this organisation, important aspect of helping youths organise and take responsibility for their activities, as a step in taking responsibility for their lives.

Pooling and topical specialisation rather than geographically and organisationally dedicated resources

In one organisation searching ways to economise and get more benefits from the resources spent, there is an initiative to redefine the roles of a category of employees. This category was created a couple of decades ago and previously helped the district board of directors with their lobbying directed at local government and enterprises. The new idea is to create a national pool, where employees can specialise on certain issues and then help counsel and coach boards or groups of members at district, regional or national level. This change will not be easy to accomplish, as the present way of working has a long history in the organisation and is firmly rooted in many people's minds. However, the managing director believes that the change will be beneficial not only as a way of economising, but also in challenging set ways and calling for new ideas on how to conduct lobbying.

This is one example of problems – or at least rigidity – arising from the geographical organisational structure that is typical of most of the organisations represented in the study. Others have appeared above. Another one follows below, but with a somewhat different characterisation of the problem.

Dynamic networks and communities of interest instead of geographical organisation

Many organisations have started thinking in terms of communities of interest rather than a traditional geographic way of organising. In one organisation, experiencing a polarisation age-wise, the two forms are believed to serve somewhat different categories. The members are on the one hand aged 50 and upwards, with a mean age around 70. On the other hand, the youth sections are thriving, but members in

the span 30 to 50 years of age are few. The social aspect of organisational work tends to be important among the young members. Geographical mobility is high among young people, but when they come to a new place and contact the local section of the organisation, they have no social network, and the activities of the new section may also appear unfamiliar compared with the old one. The secretary general believes that network organising as communities of interest could help bridge the problem. The networks would provide social contacts that are not limited to a specific place. Organising in networks according to interest in specific issues could also help ensure that the activities in different local sections bear greater resemblance with each other, and that the contacts within an interest network can help an individual who wants to strengthen the activities dealing with a specific topic in their local section.

Analysis

Boundary spanning, reducing differences and breaking down boundaries are popular themes in society today. Although the literature reviewed above pointed at the usefulness of boundaries and the need to both break down *and create* boundaries, the third-sector top managers interviewed seem more intent on breaking down and crossing boundaries than erecting them. Time will show if they will soon start seeing some new boundaries as beneficial, or if the abundance and restrictiveness of existing boundaries is great enough to allow for benefits to be achieved through the singular reduction of boundaries for some time to come.

Meetings was a central theme in the managers' accounts. One aspect was getting people to meet to reduce their fantasies about each other (cf. Fink 2006). But in addition to physical meetings, the idea to increase the reporting transparency to the same end existed. Referring to the complications of mediated communication (Ngwenyama and Lee 1997), it can be expected that reporting transparency is a more difficult path towards the goal. Although it increases the apparent visibility, and thus presumably decreases the latitude for fantasies concerning what others are doing, achieving and intending, a report can also *give rise* to speculation concerning why it contains what it does and why it is phrased the way it is. Thus, reporting transparency needs to be complemented by a dialogue concerning thoughts that the reports give rise to.

Although technology-mediated communication restricts the richness of communication (Daft and Lengel 1986), this is not always viewed as something negative. An interesting use of IT to facilitate meetings and perspective making (Boland and Tenkasi 1995) was suggested in the organisation where intentional use was made of the restriction of cues provided by textual IT-mediated communication to transcend hierarchical boundaries. Using mediated communication to hide the identity of the sender, the idea was that greater focus would be placed on the content of the message than on status of the sender. The manager in this case viewed the attempt as successful, but we can expect that people will not completely refrain from speculating about who the sender is and what the sender's motives are.

Other uses of IT explored the possibilities to increase peripheral participation (cf. Gaved et al. 2006). In one example IT was used to increase efficiency, not to earn money but to make the tasks of functionaries less arduous. The web-based administrative system was designed to promote peripheral participation in administration, instead of concentrating the administration on a few functionaries. If used as intended, such initiatives may offer a way to increase the recruitment of functionaries.[2] However, IT applications typically also give rise to new support and administrative tasks. Therefore, the net effect can be difficult to assess in advance. The "Closest neighbour" initiative has some characteristics similar to the previous example. If it works, it can alleviate some of the pressure on the central staff. However, unlike the previous example, it aims at knowledge transfer and creation, not just at administration. Unlike many other attempts at changed organising, this one encouraged a move towards geographical concentration – specifically facilitating the contact between geographical neighbours. Many other ideas took as their starting point that geographical borders needed to be crossed. The promotion of contact based on geographical proximity could be seen as attempting to capitalise on the richness of communication offered

[2] This is a prominent theme in the "virtual volunteer" literature – a field not specifically included in this study. See, for example, Wilson et al (2001) and Cravens (2006).

by face to face meetings. It could also be viewed as drawing on existing boundaries, in the hope that being neighbours confers a sense of common identity that will facilitate communication. However, it is not unlikely that the IT initiative as such will have little effect until promoted by other means. Just like the network facilitators studied by Pan and Leidner (2003) and the *spider* in one of the third-sector examples above were needed to bring about fruitful dialogue, some complementing organising initiative may be needed in this case to reach the desired effect.

From the managers' accounts, there seems to be a trust in the beneficial powers of IT-mediated communication. Referring to research on communities of practice, knowledge management and IT mediation, this trust is perhaps somewhat naïve. On the other hand, perhaps the technological touch will bring new groups of members to contribute – and maybe even to shoulder the new tasks that are likely to arise because of the use of IT.

The spider and the network facilitator role can be viewed as creating "know-who" specialists (Christensen 2007). In the example of creating networks to channel single-issue enthusiasm and increase peripheral participation, it would also need to be complemented by coordinating knowledge, since the purpose was to link interested people to further concerted action. In these and several other examples, increasing peripheral participation is a central theme. There is a wish to facilitate quick entry (and possibly exit). The Wiki experience reported by Gaved et al (2006) and supported by wikipedia statistics, lends weight to the argument that organising for a good cause will not spontaneously lead to an even distribution of workload. It is also unlikely that someone entering a functionary role will be able to exit it easily. Mindful action by top leaders – and many others in the organisational hierarchies – will probably be needed to make easy entry and quick, orderly exits from functionary positions a reality rather than a dream. But the Wiki experience also shows that there can be substantial contribution from a large number of "members" if they have control over the extent of their contribution.

So far the analysis has dealt with the potential gains – but increased peripheral participation also makes ideographic organisational identities more visible. Some view this as important. They see a risk that the functionaries and employees carrying a large part of the workload – and then also launching initiatives – get out of step with the majority of less active members. Peripheral participation is then a way to get the member values to influence the direction of central administrators' effort. Others view it as a problem – requiring the education of the peripheral actors to encompass the "true" organisational goals.

Judging from previous research, it can be expected that in both cases, arenas for perspective making, a good ba, will be needed. The people involved will need to find ways of formulating and externalising their ideas and points of view, exchanging and further developing them together. They will then need some sense of a common goal, at least at a meta level, and probably some type of boundaries identifying them as a group distinguishable from people in general. If the managers want the "true" organisational goals to play an important part in the jointly created perspective, they will have to take an active – and receptive – part in the dialogue, trying to formulate and spread a meta identity or mediatory myths that are consonant with their view of proper goals, and yet can include – and influence – the goals and values held by, and being formed by, others. Following Weick and his ideas about sensemaking, our views are not set and constant, but are dynamic and created in interaction with others. Thus, participating in a dialogue can help influence the other participants' sensemaking. However, as noted by Ngwenyama and Lee (1997), we *interpret* what is being said and are sensitive to what we experience as unwarranted attempts at influencing us. This critical stance is probably more present in an idealistic organisation, were participation is to a large extent based on voluntary contributions, than in a public or private sector organisation, where participation is largely based on monetary incentives, on being paid for ones efforts.

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