Reframing the problems in the building sector

Lars Sunding  
Lund Institute of Technology, Lund University, Sweden  
e-mail:lars.sunding@bodab.se

Anders Ekholm  
Lund Institute of Technology, Lund University, Sweden  
e-mail:anders.ekholm@caad.lth.se

Curt R. Johansson  
Lund University, Sweden  
e-mail:curt_r.johansson@psychology.lu.se

Per Odenrick  
Lund Institute of Technology, Lund University, Sweden  
e-mail:per.odenrick@design.lth.se

ABSTRACT

Due to increasing costs and some noted cases of construction failures and cartels, three extensive investigations of the Swedish building sector have recently been carried out. The problems presented are substantially concordant in the three inquiries, and the actors in the branch agree. All of the inquiries state the necessity of changing the culture, attitudes and behaviour of the building community. It is remarkable that all the suggestions for remedies are technocratic or bureaucratic. The logical question that follows from the identification of the problems is not addressed. Nor is it answered by the suggestions offered. This article seeks explanations for why the logical question is not asked, either by investigators or by company management. Four imaginable reasons are discussed. Some relevant concepts will be discussed briefly – cultural change, learning, prerequisites and problems concerning targeted group work. A proposal for a humanistic approach to the problem is submitted, and a suggestion for further studies is presented.

Keywords: value-creating collaboration, leadership, cultural change, change strategy, organisational learning, action science.

BACKGROUND

The Swedish building sector has lately been the target of quite straightforward criticism. Three recent and extensive investigations, two public (SOU 2000:44; SOU 2002:115) and one from the sector itself (SBI:s Byggkommission 2002), substantially agree on shortcomings, inefficiency, unsound competition and insufficient knowledge. Difficulties in implementing new technology have also been pointed out by the national development programme for the use of ICT in the building sector – IT Bygg & Fastighet 2002. In their last three year effort they addressed these questions specifically.
This article is the first in the research project “Model for value-creating collaboration in the construction process supported by digital networks”. The project addresses cultural aspects together with phenomena related to groups and individuals to explain the problems and to form the starting-point for a new approach to value-creating collaboration.

Objectives

The objective of the research project is to find new approaches to these problems in the building sector. The idea is to give priority to the organic part of work instead of the structural part, which seems to be more common in technical organisations (cf. Argyris and Schön 1996). The organic part of work is defined as all that comprises human activity — i.e. phenomena related to individuals – biology, psychology, cognition, learning etc., and phenomena related to groups – relations, roles, groupthink, harassment etc. The structural part of work is the technical and structural aids required, i.e. methods, standards, premises, quality systems, computer programs, tools, techniques etc. The project will investigate whether its findings can be applied to structural methods and applications supported by ICT and the Internet.

Our approach has also been identified by Boff (2001): “In the new millennium, the possibility for well-designed co-operative work environments – closely matched to the way in which people perceive, think, and act with respect to the tasks they are trying to accomplish – will presumably yield significant and measurable benefits in productive outcome”. The need of investigation can be derived from (Ericson and Johansson 1994) stating that: “The topics of knowledge and how to look at things in the encounter that a construction project represents are unexamined areas.” (Authors’ translation).

The objective of this article is to outline a foundation for the work to follow through: (1) Investigating the complex of problems concerning human co-operation in the building sector; (2) Describing how the actors in the sector experience these problems and the possibility to solve them; (3) Looking into possible causes of contradictory behaviour; and (4) Discussing some relevant concepts for change and development, and suggesting ways of thinking and acting to produce behavioural change.

Disposition

By way of introduction, the three reports are presented and commented upon. After that the building sector's way of looking at and facing the problems presented in the reports is discussed. A vicious circle in the reasoning is identified – the construction process is to be changed by changing the culture, the behaviour, and the attitudes, but these are to be changed by changing the construction process. Different possible explanations for this apparent logical oversight are discussed. This leads into action science, the science for the practitioner, which is briefly presented together with some other relevant concepts. The article concludes with a suggestion for reframing the problems in the building sector.

INTRODUCTION

Problems of the Swedish building sector

All three reports introduced at the outset describe the building sector, its activities and its impact from a comprehensive company or public perspective. The problems identified can be categorised into a number of subgroups: High building costs; Defects and shortfalls; Low level of innovation; Black economy and (to some extent) Bad work environment. When it comes to the causes of the problems, the picture is still quite complex. Some causes suggested in the different reports are: Lack of competition, Organisation of the
building sector. Unequal strength between the sector parties, Poor product liability, Culture and attitudes, and Low level of education. When it comes to suggestions for solutions, the reports differ. The two public reports, SOU 2000:44 and SOU 2002:115, take a political perspective, while the one from the building sector, SBI:s Byggkommission (2002) takes a commercial view.

The report summaries focus mostly on economy and effectiveness, and various problems of different importance are formulated. The span in the degree of detail in the solutions is also large – from visionary suggestions such as “change the culture of the sector” to more tangible suggestions such as “produce detailed regulations about how to avoid problems with moisture and mildew and how to measure moisture.” Concerning how to implement suggested solutions and convince all parties to adopt them there seems to be an obvious lack of knowledge and relevant experiences.

The public inquiries

The two public reports address the building sector problem from the outside. Their tangible suggestions are mainly about how to “force” the sector to act appropriately. According to those suggestions, change will be achieved by laws, rules and control. SOU 2002:115 points out (in what appears to be contradictory) that “The solution of the problem is probably not to be found in more regulation. Instead there are reasons to believe that the present problems are caused by earlier regulations, for example the regulation of public housing loans” (Authors’ translation). This report also touches upon issues like changing culture and attitudes as a solution to the problems, but without any tangible suggestions as to how this shall be achieved.

The building sector report

The Swedish Contractors Association, Sveriges Byggindustrier – SBI, has conducted an independent inquiry via a special commission. This looks at the problems from a sector point of view, and also from a general perspective. This inquiry brings into the discussion two overall and internal sector problems that have not been touched upon in the public inquiries – future competition with other industrial sectors and countries regarding labour and energy. The appropriateness of present rules of business (laws and regulations) is questioned, but left to the public sector to investigate. This inquiry agrees with the assessment made in the public inquiries about the problems in the sector.

The suggested solution of the problems is interesting – a common development programme for the entire building sector. This indicates some kind of insight that the sectors’ way of solving their problems has come to an end – old solutions are not enough. A sector must first understand, then learn and develop, before it can define the “new” things that have to be done. According to the investigators, this shall be done by looking at and co-operating with companies in other sectors.

International relevance

The problems

In both SOU 2000:44 and SOU 2002:115, brief international comparisons are made regarding the problems in the building sector. It is concluded that the problems experienced in Sweden are almost the same as those in other European countries studied. When it comes to building costs, it is even established that Sweden is not among the countries with the highest cost level. Regarding the problem of a “black” economy, SOU 2002:115 points at several countries, The Netherlands, Ireland, Norway, Germany, Great Britain and Belgium, where action has already been taken to address it. Concerning
Denmark, SOU 2002:115 refers to a recent report similar to the Swedish. It illustrates three major problems with the construction business: (1) It is too expensive; (2) The customers’ needs are neglected; (3) There are too many defects and shortfalls. In Great Britain, the issues of increasing costs, defects and low productivity have been investigated on several occasions. The best-known inquiries are the so-called Latham (1994) and Egan (1998) reports, and they reveal problems similar to those in Sweden.

Possible solutions

Although the phenomena discussed in this article are closely related to the characteristics of human beings everywhere, we find different cultural attitudes to them in different countries and organisations. For instance, major differences in business and management culture can be seen when large, centrally controlled American companies in Sweden are compared with small and mid-sized Swedish companies. It will probably be difficult to apply the ideas presented in this article in large hierarchical organisations with large power discrepancies among organisation members, cf. Hofstede (1980).

ANALYSIS

Comments on the reports

Even though the sector investigators seem to have found a new, self-critical and interesting angle of approach to the problems, they really do not offer any tangible suggestions for how to act. One obvious risk here is that the reports might be received with scepticism and be considered irrelevant, vague and abstract by the sector technocrats. However, at one point the investigators are very detailed, tangible and sharp – “disqualify hierarchic leadership…..the future co-worker needs stimulation, not orders” (Authors’ translation).

There is some risk that leaders of the sector will dismiss the statement as unfair and incorrect. In the best scenario the statement serves as the alarm clock it is probably meant to be. Even if this conclusion is not widely supported, there might be some reason to take a closer look at the issue of leadership. Organisational psychologists (e.g. Ahltorp 1999) emphasise the importance of leadership, and point out that the knowledge of the organic part of leadership is often low among industrial leaders. Leaders, unaware of this, often act in a counterproductive manner.

The unreflected step - the paradox

What is notable in the three reports is that there is practically no discussion about what is the disease and what is the symptom, or what the effect is and what the cause is. They all seem to have the preconceived notion that the disease is high costs and that the cause is unequal strength between the sector parties or poor product liability. The conclusion derived from this kind of reasoning is that increasing the product liability will decrease the costs. It must be questioned whether this will in fact happen. Defining the problems formulated in the reports as symptoms, and then asking questions such as what is the connotation of shoddy building, cartels and high building costs and why is there shoddy building, cartels and high building costs, will suggest other conclusions than those presented in the reports. Instead of following up the conclusions about the organic part of the building activity and asking questions such as how does one change a culture, a behaviour, an attitude or a way of thinking, the reports suggest technocratic and bureaucratic solutions that have obviously not solved the problems previously (Argyris and Schön 1996). Ericson and Johansson (1994) have made the same observation: “The systems aimed to raise efficiency often follow the same pattern, where the target is to
introduce structure and to systematise the business activities....This rests on the idea that it should be technical and rational considerations that shall guide the construction process” (Authors’ translation).

Green (1998) has identified a similar phenomenon. He has made a critical analysis of the concept of Business Process Re-engineering, BPR. He declares that: “The use of the term “re-engineering” in itself invokes an image that organisations can be treated as machines in need of a “technical-fix””. Furthermore, he writes: “The overriding assumption is that the organisation is unitary and that the corporate objectives can be determined in isolation from the aspirations of the employees. From this point of view, the defining principles of BPR are no different from Taylor’s (1911) concept of Scientific Management”. Green asks why BPR and other similar ways of thinking (TQM, lean production, ISO 9000 etc.) have had such an uncritical impact in the [British] building sector when there are several studies questioning these in other industrial sectors (Grint 1994; Micklethwait and Wooldridge 1997). One statement made in SOU 2002:115 can be interpreted as support for the idea that this can be questioned in the Swedish building sector as well: “In the light of what has been presented about construction errors, the conclusion can be drawn that the building companies’ own quality control through QA systems and ISO accreditations doesn't work” (Authors’ translation).

Possible explanations of the paradox

One interesting question is why today’s leadership often make the seemingly logical mistake of asking the wrong questions. One explanation could be that the answer is to be found in a completely different place than that in which today’s leadership is accustomed to looking. The leaders simply do not possess the knowledge and experience related to the organic part of leadership. But regardless of that, it is striking that they do not notice the shortcomings in their reasoning an observation noted for managers and business executives in general by Argyris and Schön (1996). Four possible explanations for the paradox will be discussed – don’t want – don’t dare – don’t know how – unaware.

Don’t want

Green (1998) sees political reasons for the paradox: "Whilst industry leaders are fond of calling for a "cultural change" (e.g. Latham 1994), the current structure of funding construction management research acts only to reinforce the existing culture of "control and command". Further on Green writes: “A consideration of the political model of organisations has further suggested that this rhetoric is propagated within the construction industry as a means of protecting vested interests”. One cannot exclude the possibility that in some circles there exist elements of such political motives as Green suggests – to retain power and to satisfy selfish interests. This has been shown convincingly by Overmeer in an American construction company (see Argyris and Schön 1996). It is unlikely that industrial leadership actively opposes the companies’ development and competitive prospects with the intention of satisfying their own interests. But if so, their employers, owners, company boards and society have everything to gain by getting to work on the problem.

Don’t dare

Fear and resistance to change and development affect leaders as well as other employees. To take risks with the company’s or other’s money is one thing: to take risks with one’s own personal security and future is something else. Regardless of whether it is fear or inadequate behaviour that makes leaders act in seemingly illogical or counter-productive fashion, they need support in their change of work. Even if these people can be
considered responsible, it is more fruitful to try to understand the hidden phenomena behind their behaviour than to demand responsibility via routine.

Don’t know how

The vast majority of the building sector leaders have been recruited from the technical staff. Skilled technicians have been entrusted to become leaders, probably following the implicit leadership philosophy that to work well implies ability to lead. “This person can do the job: do it as he does it (it is often a man in the building sector) and everything will be fine.” This is not an illogical idea in a stationary condition, but it is not enough when you have to lead, motivate and stimulate individuals and organisations in a change or development process. In this scenario the leaders have identified the problem, but they do not know what to do about it. This is not unreasonable, bearing in mind the very sparse training most leaders have gained in human sciences and leadership.

The leaders are not to be blamed for this. One explanation can be that the culture does not encourage leaders to develop their leadership skills. Discussions in workplaces about leadership and how it shall be conducted are rare. Another explanation can perhaps be found in how leaders frame their role. Somehow, each individual leader has to interpret his role according to the best of his ability. It is then reasonable to look at older colleagues and copy their behaviour. A common attitude among senior leaders, often unaware of their influence on the organisation, is that they, empowered by their experience, have no need for further education and training.

Unaware

Another interesting and possible explanation of the paradox can be found in the phenomenon Argyris et al. (1985) compared with some kind of blindness. It manifests itself in a way that in popular parlance is called “practising what you preach”. The individual is afflicted with one way of thinking that he awards to himself - “espoused-theory”. This espoused theory represents what the person thinks is right, and it is used when judging the actions of other people. In contrast to that is what Argyris calls “theory-in-use”. This theory is used when acting. Differences in espoused-theory and theory-in-use may explain some seemingly illogical behaviour. This phenomenon is associated with the human character to avoid threatening and embarrassing situations, and it might be considered to be some kind of defence mechanism to protect humans from troublesome, complex and contradictory situations.

One remarkable observation made in (SOU 2002:115) can lend support to Argyris phenomenon of “blindness”: “One lasting impression from the commission’s work is that most of the actors stand up behind the problem description, but without exception don’t consider themselves as having anything to do with the problem’s origin or solution” (Authors’ translation). This blindness might be an explanation of the illogical circular reasoning of some managers. Apparently they do not understand that they personally have to change in order not just to repeat inoperative but well-known actions, but lead and conduct the action needed to achieve change. Organisational psychologists are well aware of this situation. Ahltorp (1999) writes “Today we know enough about how to change organisations in a significant way. We have just one problem left, to get the leaders to adopt it” (Authors’ translation).

ACTION SCIENCE AND OTHER RELEVANT CONCEPTS

Action science (Argyris et al. 1985) is a branch of science that could be called “the science of the practitioner”. Natural science is about things, and tries to answer questions...
such as “how does it work - and why?”, and social science is about human relations and tries to answer questions such as “how did they act – and why?”. Unlike mainstream science aiming at explaining and predicting phenomena, action science is trying to create communities of inquiry in order to understand social phenomena, and also enhance learning and promote change and development. This is achieved by asking and answering questions such as "What shall I do to reach my objectives?"

Action science deals with action and change in real life contexts. This may be one reason why it is sometimes subjected to criticism when measured by traditional scientific rules, according to which results must be repeatable under some predetermined conditions. This cannot be done in real life settings, for logical reasons, because such settings cannot be replicated. Neither can we move reality into a laboratory without making severe simplifications. Action science is dedicated to developing a conscious way of thinking and acting in concordance, to avoiding unconscious behaviour that is counterproductive. Action science may be applied to increase the knowledge of how business activities are developed and concrete problems are solved.

Argyris describes two types of behaviour that he calls Model I and Model II behaviour. These models are associated with the theories mentioned above – espoused-theory and theory-in-use. It should be noted that it is not a matter of different types of people, but rather of different behaviour. One and the same person can act according to both models at different times. Model I can roughly be described as a large gap between a person’s espoused theory and his theory-in-use, whereas these theories are concordant according to Model II. To help people develop accurate and constructive attitudes matching Model II and behave in agreement with these, Argyris introduces the concept double-loop-learning, which is based on reflection in two steps. Problem solving is accompanied by reflection over the progressing process itself. These two steps have to interact if lasting change is to be achieved.

**Parallel processes (and problems)**

One critical factor in all kinds of problem solving is the conceptual context that guides our thoughts into specific patterns. Schön calls this the framing of the problem (Schön 1983). A common approach in technical problem solving is to focus on what is to be achieved, the result. In Figure 1 this “technical” problem is designated, $P_{TP}$. Symbolically, this problem is located on the working area between the two persons. Other simultaneous processes, $P_R$, $P_I$, and $P_C$, are often disregarded. $P_R$ represents the relations between the parties and different kinds of group-related phenomena. $P_I$ represents mental processes going on inside person X. These can be protective and defence mechanisms, fears, limited ability etc. $P_C$ represents external processes going on in the context that will affect the situation. $P_{TP}$ is associated with what shall be achieved and $P_R$, $P_I$ and $P_C$ with how it shall be done. $P_R$, $P_I$ and $P_C$ will affect $P_{TP}$, especially if we aren’t aware of them.

![Figure 1](image-url)
A constructive and professional way to increase the efficiency of our efforts is to limit the negative impact of these parallel processes on the problem solving process. One way of doing this is to reframe the problem to include these parallel processes as well, i.e. force them down to the working area in front of us. The new problem framing will thus be: 

\[ P_{TP}' = P_{TP} + P_R + P_I + P_C. \]

CULTURE AS A STRATEGIC PARAMETER

The culture of the building sector is one of the parameters that ought to be changed, according to the reports. But this implies a Catch-22 situation that has to be resolved. How inclined an organisation is to change depends on its culture. If its culture is not disposed to change it will not change (Schein 1992). If you want to resolve this, you have to consider the change itself as your problem and ask the question – how do you change a sector’s culture?

Fear

Individual patterns of behaviour may be relevant to explain resistance to change. The primitive and the rational alarm systems in the human brain are trying to control our attention and action (Dozier 2000). The primitive alarm system is rapid, but lacks the ability to define fear into more accurate categories. For instance, if this system reacts to a snake it cannot identify if it is dangerous or not. If the rational system cannot exceed the primitive system we will act automatically, and probably make mistakes. This can be seen as “acting on the safe side”, but in modern organisations with high demands on performance, we cannot afford the counterproductive behaviour that these instinctive reactions carry with them. If one person’s concern about his future position means that he becomes passive (fear-panic-escape), and thus does not offer his opinion, then the organisation will lose capacity. This will also happen if a person, thanks to his aggressive image (fear-anger-fight), succeeds in “convincing” a group to make the wrong decision.

Fear is a basic and probably seriously underestimated factor that will affect human behaviour all the time. An organisational culture that can produce confidence and offer support to develop awareness can probably increase its efficiency and competitiveness (Schein 1992). Fear is considered in some cultures as a sign of weakness, and something to be ashamed of. This might result in people trying to hide their fear or deny it. If this can be reframed so that fear is acknowledged as a human characteristic that afflicts all of us, more or less, then we will have greater opportunity to manage its negative effects.

Reactive or proactive approach

Changes in the environment of an organisation will influence it and require it to adapt. This kind of change happens when the external change is already a fact, it is reactive. Jumping all the time from one problem to another, it is difficult to understand the underlying causes and see the patterns of the problems. This external pressure has one advantage though: it is easier to attain acceptance of change when the “crisis” is a fact. However, this will cost a lot of valuable human energy that could be used for something more edifying. To become proactive, i.e. to act before the damage has occurred, implies that the changing force is generated inside the organisation. A skillful use of this opportunity will create a competitive advantage. The difficulty of being ahead of the course of events, is to gather and interpret relevant information. The next obstacle is to convince the organisation to take action before people can see the need for it. The challenge is to create an organisation in which all the inherent capacity can be extracted. This requires that the
problem framing is appropriate. The question to be asked is – how does one generate productivity when considering the second order problem definition, $P_{TP'}$, defined above?

**Strategies for change**

Irrespective of what induces a change, there are different ways to proceed. Norrgren (1996), performing organisational studies, discusses two strategies for change – the programmatic strategy and the learning-based strategy. The *programmatic strategy* is traditionally used in strictly hierarchical organisations and characterised by a centralistic way of thinking. The process is launched centrally, objectives and strategies are drawn up centrally and a project group creates a rational programme based on order, structure and control, often with the help of external experts. This "logical" setting is then to be communicated to the personnel who merely have to adjust to the "well-functioning whole" that has been created by the project group. The tools that Norrgren mentions as examples of the programmatic strategy are: *Education* of key personnel (leaders, specialists, foremen); *Information campaigns; Investigations* to identify problems; *Reorganisation; Change of systems;* and *Pilot projects*. Experiences from this kind of approach, according to Norrgren, are not very positive. Some reasons for this are: *Lack of understanding* of the motives (possibly easier with strong external pressure); *Lack of acceptance* of the change (possibly easier with strong external pressure); and *Lack of respect* for the solutions (often based on simplistic assumptions about the reality that is to be changed).

The *learning-based strategy*, recommended by Norrgren, is aimed not only at reaching a new state of the organisation but also at learning something about the organisational culture and about oneself. The difference between the two strategies is that the learning-based strategy focuses more on the change itself than on the result of the change, i.e. how the objectives are emerging and how the change is carried through. The reasons why Norrgren prefers this model are: *Confidence and motivation* (the leadership and the personnel have to learn to accept living with change as a positive challenge); *Greater credibility* (honest leadership ambition and reasonable reality framing); *Participation* in problem definition and analysis; and *Learning* (better solution understanding).

**Learning**

Learning thus becomes a key process when it comes to change. If a learning culture can be created, there is always a transformational pressure that is needed to produce change. The quest for knowledge itself becomes a motive. The knowledge found is gradually interwoven with the existing knowledge, making it expand continuously. In that kind of context individuals are trained to capture, transform and turn knowledge into concrete action. The learning culture is closely related to the well-known organisational development strategy “continuous improvement”. Wolfe and Kolb (1991) have formulated the experience-based learning process in a rather well-known model (Figure 2). In this model, learning will take place in a cyclical course of events based on the persons' reflections over acquired experiences. This means that both experiences and reflection have to be in place before learning can occur. The digested experience will be transformed into some kinds of theories and hypotheses that are practically tested and assessed. This will lead to new experiences,... and so on.

Depending on different personal characteristics, one can enter the model from different directions and move in different paths, but the main principles are the same. The circular model can be refined with two dimensions: *grasp* and *transform*. With this addition it is easier to understand the practitioner's dilemma. The practitioner, who often addresses himself as “doer”, prefers to move in the grasp-dimension. The practical experience tends to be transformed into theories without any reflection or evaluation.

Argyris et al. (1985) have identified an organisation’s attitude to the notion of “making errors” as a key parameter for the development of its culture. The crux of the matter is whether it is considered horrible to make mistakes, or if the errors are considered to be raw material for the production of knowledge. This can also be a possible explanation for why many practitioners seem so eager to take the shortcut in the cycle of learning. If it is horrible to make errors then it is understandable why people avoid reflection, since this might confirm that one has failed. In that case it can be seen as much more pleasant to tailor a suitable defence and excuses from the abundant opportunities the complex reality can offer. According to Argyris et al., the two ways of relating to “making errors” will lead to two different kinds of culture. One can be called a shrinking, declining culture and the other expanding and increasing. Figure 3 is an attempt to combine Kolb’s learning model with the “shortcut” that can be extrapolated from Argyris.

Ericson and Johansson (1994) ask a question that seems relevant in the junction between experience-based learning, the shortcut and the Swedish building sector: “Is the experience-based knowledge that is adopted into the building process a tacit, optimal and accumulated knowledge based on many years of experience, or is it an indifferent, routine use of old solutions year after year — or is it conceivable that it is ignorance beyond critical scrutiny that is hidden in the tacit knowledge of experience” (Authors’ translation). Rolf (1991) states: “An occupational group can get so familiarised with its activities where..."
the real state of things may be hidden and the familiarity is based on more or less false ideas”. This means according to Rolf that the group’s self-esteem can be upheld but also obstruct development of competence.

Argyris et al.’s (1985) theory of structural blindness related to the discrepancy between espoused theory and theory in use is one way of explaining these phenomena. To the learning organisation is added an active effort to achieve a deeper understanding, mental (P₁) as well as situational (P₃), and to develop human relations and co-operation processes (P₂). The purpose of the addition is to turn the negative effects of the parallel processes (P₁, P₂, P₃) into positive ones, and in that manner raise the organisation’s operational and value-creating ability. For the individual the organisation will be more supportive, forgiving and beneficial. For the organisation, it means that available energy can be used constructively, rather than managing anxiety, frustration, defensiveness or short-term tactical behaviour.

CONCLUSIONS

Reports about the problems of the Swedish building sector stress the importance of cultural problems. However, managers do not possess the knowledge and experience related to the organic part of leadership and often act in a counterproductive manner. Argyris et al.’s theory of the discrepancy between espoused theory and theory in use may explain this “structural blindness”. A “technical” approach to problem solving commonly disregards group-related phenomena, mental processes, and external processes in the context. The problems need to be reframed to include these parallel processes. Reframing is supported by Argyris et al’s concept of double-loop-learning, where problem solving is accompanied by reflection over the progressing process itself.

In order to change a sector’s culture, a learning-based strategy that focuses on personal engagement and responsibility is to prefer rather than a programmatic hierarchical strategy. The attitude to “making errors” is a key parameter for the development of its culture. In this paper the theories behind action science formulated by Argyris et al are assumed to lead to a successful framing of the problems. The goal of our research is to understand and pave the way for a learning organisation expanded with active development of awareness, human relations, communication and a proactive attitude. The effects of the approach described will be studied in an empirical part of the project.

REFERENCES


