

BA, COMMUNICATION AND TIME AS ENABLERS OF LEADING

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Abstract

This paper presents a communication model in the context of leading professionals in a dynamic business environment. Considering leading in the context of communication, three different objectives can be found. First, the leaders of an organization have to communicate its image in advance and in a powerful way to find those experts they need. Secondly, the leaders must influence to the employees so that they commit to the objectives of the organization. Thirdly, the leaders must be able to make the experts to deliver all the relevant information, knowledge and competence they have to the organization. The prerequisite for the communication objectives to be reached is that a moment in the time-space, i.e., ba is created by the leaders and the employees.

Keywords

Leading, time, collaboration

INTRODUCTION

This paper presents a communication model in the context of leading professionals in a dynamic business environment. It is assumed that in a turbulent environment, the leading process becomes rather problematic without continuous communication both during the actual leading process and in advance. The paper follows Aula (2000) when defining that communication - or other interaction - is a process, where interacting entities are transferring information either uni-, bi- or multi-directionally. This paper is based on the hermeneutics research approach. First, the phenomenon of the need to lead professionals when working in a turbulent business environment is described. Then the reasons behind the need to lead are explained. Thirdly, the theory of human communication is described and compared to the explained reasons. Finally, a solution to the phenomenon, a communication model, is described and evaluated. The paper is a part of ongoing doctoral thesis research work concerning leading process in information and/or time critical situations.

Stähle and Grönroos (2000) studied the management of intellectual capital including the management of information flows and knowledge. They extended the concept of the working dimensions of an organization to include not only the mechanistic and organic environments but a dynamic network as well. In a mechanically functioning machine the organization is directed from the top of the hierarchy and everything is controlled and predictable. Information flows from the top management to the employees. Leading, i.e., communication is seldom performed. The characteristics of an organic environment are controlled growth, continuous change and management of tacit knowledge. Information flow is interactive and there is a need to have long dialogues to reach consensus. Dynamic network is a chaotic entity with a lot of redundant information and spontaneous connections.

Currently all organizations have departments that need to adopt characteristics of organic and dynamic working environments to be able to manage change and survive in a chaos. This means that even the most traditional organizations have faced a challenge to develop their approaches in the leading of people. For example, the manager of an internal consulting or research department cannot follow only the mechanistic environment management practices in leading. Consulting or research work is not mechanistic but the work is typically performed in an organic environment. The manager cannot lead the consultants only by giving them orders. The consultants need active support from their manager to be able to sell their work internally to the business units of their organization. In addition, the manager has to be able to facilitate interactive information flow and the performing of dialogues. In a more dynamic environment like in the external customer interface, the manager needs more advanced leading capabilities to be able to support redundant information flows and spontaneous connections.

Stähle and Grönroos (2000) stated that competence is applying of knowledge to perform a task or to solve a problem. Huuhtanen et al (2000) referring to (Raivola & Vuorensyrjä 1998) described that competence is not only having knowledge but it is active and dynamic knowing, where the contents of knowledge and the applying of knowledge are integrated. Plato defined that knowledge is justified true belief. Rasmussen (1996) described that competence is based on skills, rules or knowledge (Fig. 1.). Rule-based competence means that phases and the sequence of phases that are needed to meet the target are known, e.g., rule-based competence is needed to be able to follow processes of a manufacturing industry. Knowledge-based performance means that individuals identify targets of activities and select working practices that suit the targets, e.g., individuals have mental models about problems and ability to assess the consequences of activities.

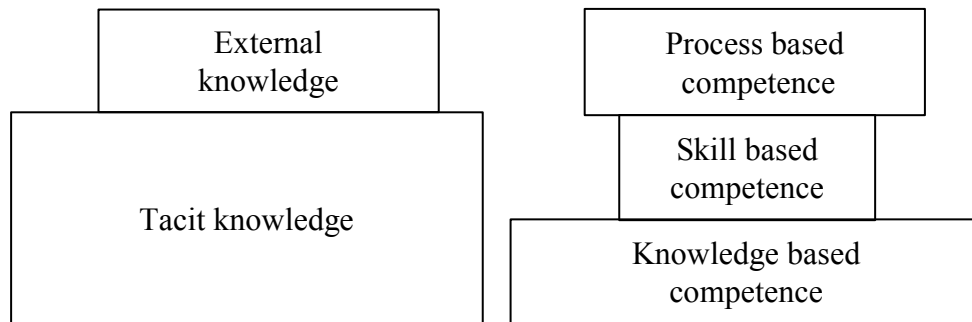


Figure. 1. The relationship between knowledge types and competence types.

In a mechanistic environment employees need typically to have only skill and rule based competencies. For example, employees shall be able to read and obey process descriptions. However, in the organic and dynamic working environments employees need to have knowledge-based competencies as well. A manager working in an organic or a dynamic environment cannot only manage his people knowledge-based competencies but he has to be involved in his people work and lead the people, i.e. their knowledge. (Mann 2002, 498) In organic and dynamic working environment interaction is needed. The manager has to make the people to communicate and work together, i.e. to collaborate. Schrage (1995) defined that collaboration is the process of shared creation: two or more individuals with complementary skills interacting to create a shared understanding that none had previously possessed or could have come to on their own. Collaboration between people requires that they have a shared view about the goals of their work. This necessitates versatile communication during a relatively long period of time put in practice in appropriate time and space.

BA AND COMMUNICATION

Ba is a place where knowledge is shared, created and used (Krogh et al. 2000) referring to (Nishida 1921). Ba is not yet widely accepted as a sound theoretical framework for knowledge sharing and communication. However, ba provides a promising concept when researching the prerequisites of a successful leading process. In this paper ba is the place and moment in the time-space, where communication and other interaction are coming into their fruition. Aula (2000) replaces the concept of ba with the concept of arena or forum. Aula's arena is conceptually very near to ba, but emphasizes communication aspects in cultural context. The basic idea is that ba needs not to be real and real time. It does not necessitate physical meeting place. It does not expect immediate feedback. It does not presume defined moment or duration of time. Ba can be virtual both in time and space as well, e.g. e-mail, intranet, videoconference, on-line meeting system. Ba grows up from needs of the group to achieve its objective. Ba is a premise of interaction. Without that, information does not flow and leading becomes even more complicated. Ba is developed and strengthened by implementing the knowledge creation process presented in (Nokaka – Takeuchi 1995). During the knowledge creation process mutual valuations, experiences, knowledge and emotions of members of the working group or an organisation are fortified. Strong ba acts as a platform, on which difficult problems can be solved with minimum efforts. By the ba-creating dialogue-process the manager in the organic and dynamic environment is able to minimize especially those effort dealing with peoples' different perspectives.

People have different motives, knowledge and worldviews. They perceive the world through this mental filter and create their individual pictures of the courses of events (Merleau-Ponty 1979) (Fig 2.). The world of facts and the world of perceptions are different, but they exchange information continuously (Fig. 3.) A learning entity living in the world of perceptions is changing itself and changes the world of facts by information exchange processes. Mental models evolve in time by continuous learning processes. Actions that people implement are based on perceptions, mental models and intuition. Intuition is your feeling that is true or exists although you have no evidence or proof of it (Sinclair 1994, 505).

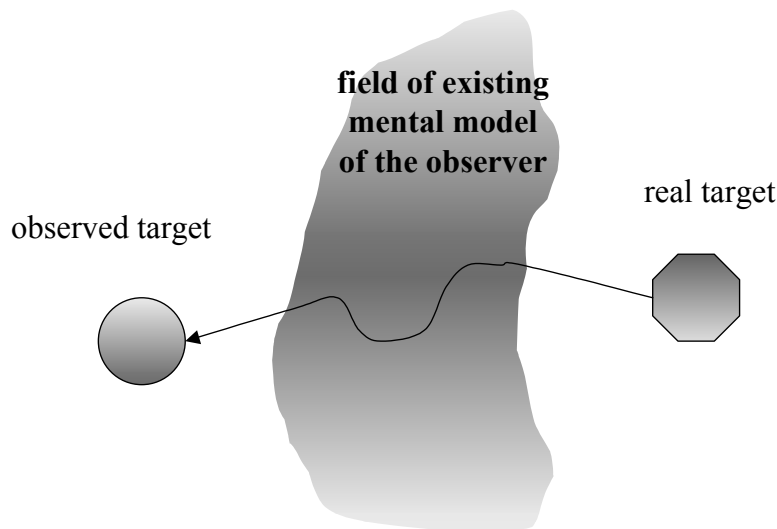


Figure 2. The entity interprets its perceptions via its personal field of mental models. (Huhtinen - Rantapelkonen 2002)

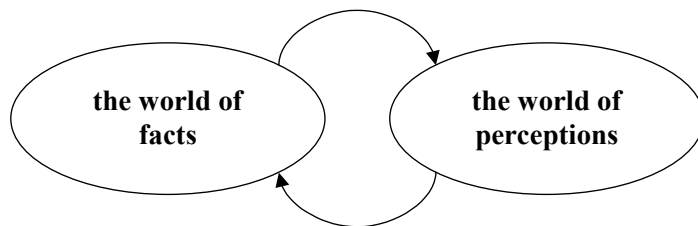


Figure 3. The world of facts and the world of perceptions are different, but they exchange information continuously.

Therefore, working together with different people can be rather challenging. Collaboration and knowledge sharing between people require that an enabling context, i.e. ba is created and developed. Ba is developed and strengthened by implementing the knowledge creation process presented in (Nokaka – Takeuchi 1995). During the knowledge creation process mutual valuations, experiences, knowledge and emotions of members of the working group or an organisation are fortified. Strong ba acts as a platform, on which difficult problems can be solved with minimum efforts. Especially those efforts dealing with peoples' different perspectives are minimised by ba-creating dialogue-process before demanding leading acts.

So, it could be thought that combining peoples' worldviews beforehand, communication needs can be minimised and focused to the essential.

Habermas (1994) argued, that those who take part in interaction, e.g., communication, should have at least one share item of knowledge. This guarantees that they construct their shared situation coherently. The shared knowledge is information by which the models for creating mutual understanding can be formed. Without the models the creation of understanding is not possible. Prerequisite is that people commit to believe in the models. This requires that information concerning the models to be communicated. The creation of shared knowledge answers to the question "why?" - why those involved want to share their valuations and knowledge. Further on, Habermas in his thinking about the concept of communication unfolds attributes of a message. Message should be authentic; it should conform the normative context, where communication event happens. It should be true, i.e. it should conform facts on view. It should be credible; it should fit in the subjective world of experience that the one who communicates represents. So, the one who communicates, will provide messages, which are verifiably true and could be believed in their context said by the one who communicates. Understanding messages is not possible if communicating parties do not share insight about the world, culture or events of life at least to some extend (Fig. 4). Efficient and smooth communication is possible only when expectations, beliefs, worldviews and appreciations behind those insights are as common as possible. In well-established communication relationship referring to those basic backgrounds is rarely needed. In this kind of situation, communicated messages can be formed to deal with new items, thoughts and events. The actual amount of transferred information can be minimized. (Nyman 2000, 26-27) So, it could be thought that combining peoples' worldviews beforehand, communication needs can be minimised and focused to the essential before demanding leading acts. (Fig. 5.)

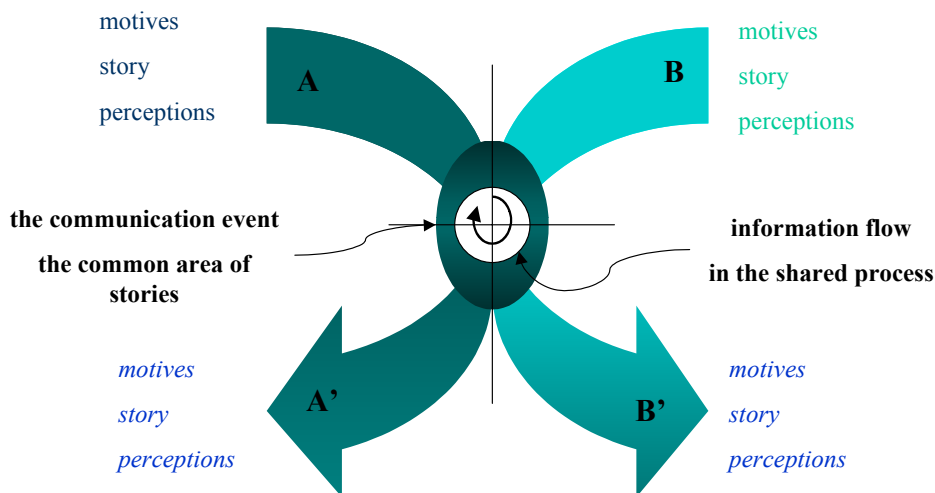


Figure 4. Communicative event between two entities.

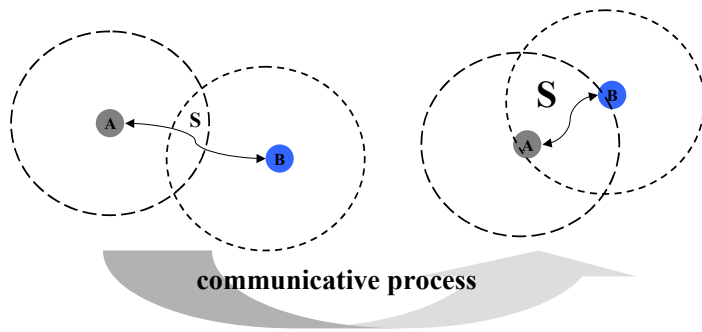


Figure 5. Bringing worldviews closer by communication. When communication situation begins, the shared area of worldviews (S) of actors A and B is limited. After temporally, qualitatively and quantitatively successful communication process, their worldviews have moved closer.

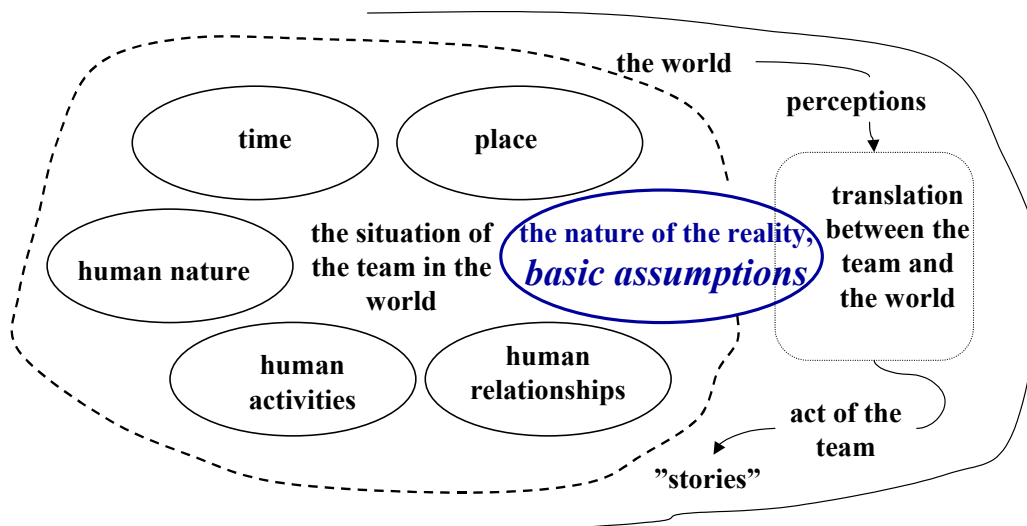


Figure 6. Culture (i.e. basic assumption) is forming the basis of interpreting information between the world and the team. According to (Schein 1987).

The culture in organisation forms basic assumptions concerning the way, how the organisation or its teams both perceive the world and make their acts to the world (Fig. 6). Culture works as “the mental filter” of the organisation. Through culture, the organisation creates its stories to the world, where it acts. The world constructs the image of the organisation by perceiving and interpreting those stories. The organisation gets its images, insight and attitudes via interpreting perceptions it can have through this cultural filter, as well. The whole organisation and its teams inside it is witnessing the world and coming through to the world via its culture.

The leader is building the ba to connect his team to the world and to form mutually accepted rules within the team (Fig. 7). These rules concern about power, roles and norms. They form a basis to communicate about the future, present and past - to deal with aspects concerning valuations and vision, objective and goals, results and outcomes. And all this without using valuable duration to form mutual understanding for every event, moment by moment.

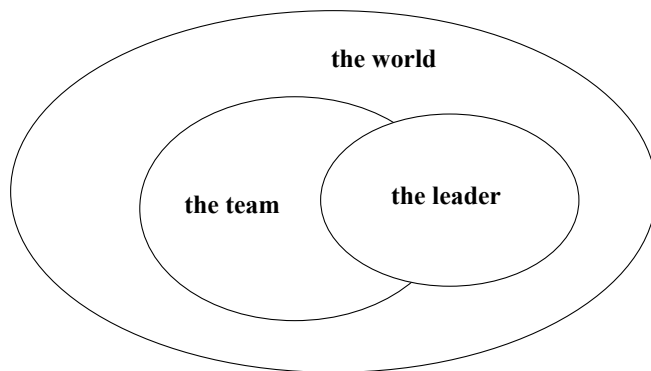


Figure 7. The leader acts as an interpreter between the world and the team. According to (Schein 1987)

It could be stated that communication is rather important in leading. It has been estimated that 98 % of leading is communicating (Aula 2000 referring to Senge 1999a, b). Communication is comprehensive process between those, who communicate. Its purpose, meaningfulness and significance are changing during time, space, situation and meaning. To be effective, communication should be unceasing and interactive in its context. The more coherent mental models are created after communication event, the better communication has succeeded. (Åberg 2000, 34-48) Personal stories of actors are merged together during communication event. An actor expresses itself through this story. It adopts information via perception and joins it after processing as a part of long-term mental models. This combination of present-day perceptions and long-term knowledge forms the story of this actor. Actors are interacting via these personal stories. Because communication needs in dissimilar leading situations are diverse, will different bas: real and virtual in time, place and space, support those leading processes divergently. Varied information (information is here understood as a concept of entity) is needed at divert moments during leading process. Some of this information can be produced beforehand in virtual and/or non-interactive ba and some of it needs concrete person-to-person real ba.

TIME AND THE COMMUNICATION MODEL

Brown & Eisenhardt (1998, 165) are referring (Grove 1996) about understanding time in making business. Grove philosophises:

1. Timing is everything.
2. Act early while the momentum still exists.
3. Act with runners, it is necessary to pass the baton at precisely the right moment.
4. The greatest danger is standing still.

Further on Brown & Eisenhardt (1998, 163-188) are writing about pace and rhythm. Pace in their concept of thinking basically means the moment, and rhythm the duration between moments.

Time could be stated as a feature of the world. Time flows unstoppable and all events of any entity and all interactions between any entities occur in this flow of time. To be able to forge relevant influence, one must understand, what duration and moment mean. Influence in leading is forged by communication. To come to fruition, some influence requires more

duration than some other, as it has been stated earlier in this paper. Grove (1996) is focusing on making acts on a proper moment. But this is not the whole truth in understanding the meaning of the time. In addition to right moment, the duration of various events and acts and effects must be understood, as well. Those durations depend on the attributes of entities, their interactions and context of events. In the context of communication, e.g. following activities require different durations at different moments and contexts: getting understanding about communicated items, learning new things, changing ones mental models, transferring explicit information, transferring implicit information, transferring skills, etc. It is understandable that moments of communication and the duration of communication process must be planned and executed divergently depending on the purpose and preferred influence of communication.

The expert must be influenced to wish to work for the enterprise. He must be convinced to commit to the organisational objectives. His knowledge must be utilized to contribute to those objectives. And finally he must be let to use his knowledge in a challenging way. All this sets specific communication demands to the leaders. Those communication processes happen rather time divergently. Communication situations, i.e., past, now, future set requirements to ba or arena of communication.

As stated, communication is quite important when leading people. Especially that is true, when leading people in a turbulent, networked working. The more extensive changes are needed, the more time and efforts communication demands. Easiest is to change knowledge, which does not include personal valuations. Changing attitudes is more complicated. Further on, to change the way someone acts is even more challenging. The most difficult and challenging task for communication is to achieve change in the behaviour of a group. (Åberg 1997, 161) When communicational relationship is non-specific or unsettled for some reasons, must a great deal of communication be focused on to define common denominator of mutual context and to define shared worldview. This requests a huge amount of information. Getting this information communicated understandably demands versatile collection of communication means used during a relatively long period of time. (Nyman 2000, 27) Successful communication requires that values, experiences, knowledge and emotions of people involved to be shared.

It is rather knotty to share knowledge about commonly agreed values and appreciations in a turbulent situation, where experts are joining and quitting a project. It seems obvious that during often quite short term collaboration it is impossible to create commonly understood values. Organisation must be able to create and communicate believable, attractive and acceptable picture about itself. By this – in advance communicated – image, organisation can attract those experts to fulfil its objectives, which it appreciates. This kind of communication needs lots of information about the future expectations of the troop of potential experts. So, organisation must be able to communicate its valuations in advance. It must rely on that it can attract those people who believe in the organisation and its ability to gain its objectives.

CONCLUSIONS

The leading process in the organic and dynamic working environment is prepared and strengthened by implementing a presented communication model. Considering leading in the context of communication, three different objectives can be found. First, the leaders of an

organisation have to communicate the image of the organization in advance and in a powerful way to find those experts they need. Future leading gets its basis from information about the future, which clarifies evolving valuations and appreciations of experts. By help of that information leader can create such a field of appreciations, where experts can identify themselves. Secondly, the leaders must influence to the employees so that they commit to the objectives of the organization. The experts must have a feeling that they are able to influence on the objectives. Otherwise they do not commit themselves completely. Thirdly, the leaders must be able to make the experts to deliver all the relevant information, knowledge and competence they have to the organization. The experts must have a feeling that their knowledge is appreciated and needed. In that case they would like to deliver all the information and knowledge they have to the enterprise. The prerequisite for the communication objectives to be reached is that a moment in the time-space, i.e., ba is created by the leaders and the employees.

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