

## PARTICIPATIVE DESIGN AT THE ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL

Merrelyn Emery (1993, 2018)

The concepts, practices and outstanding issues in changing design principle as it applies at the level of the discrete organization was the subject of the majority of discussion during the 1970-1980s. Many of the issues are also relevant at other levels but they usually surface first and are certainly more frequently debated within the context of a discrete group or organization. Regardless of the size of organization, community or governmental system, the second design principle (DP2) and the small self managing groups it creates remain as the basic building block upon which the more extended forms of democratic apparatus rests. It is important, therefore, that these blocks are brought into being by the most congruent methods available, those which will help ensure their strength and stability while not impeding their evolutionary life.

This part begins with an argument which confronts one of the central purposes of democratization. 'The Light on the Hill' at its time of writing put the whole issue squarely on the board of current political and professional thinking about industrial democracy, productivity and economic development.

Emery (F) argues that the elevation of multiskilling and retraining above the need to change the design principle from 1 to 2 is misplaced. Multiskilling will not deliver the goods unless there is a form of work organization that demands, motivates towards and creates new or higher levels of skills. One of the crucial advantages of democratic groups over the one person-shift as the unit of bureaucratic structures is that it provides learning and the conditions for continuous learning. This is of course one of the six criteria for psychological satisfaction and also one of the reasons that participative design workshops have become a basic tool of many adult educators.

Today as we begin to see the re-emergence of an interest in democratization, particularly in the third, community or welfare sector, it is worth revisiting this debate as one thing we have learnt from the history of this work is that through the cycles of interest and neglect, the same concerns and misunderstanding return with each cycle.

'Participative Design: Work and Community Life' has been rewritten, several times, to incorporate new learning coming out of intensive research done between 1989 and 1993 and again between 1993 and 2018. This new learning encompasses both clarifying the concepts and tightening up the structure and process of the workshop itself. Its current form with three briefings is even more structured than in the past and is highly effective in producing learning and excellent, implementable designs. This report of it leaves few loopholes for misunderstanding or confusion with other methods.

In 'Further Learnings about Participative Design', Emery (M) describes and analyses a much broader range of practical variations in the application of the workshop. As use of the workshop has intensified, so has experimentation for systemic change. There has been conscious attention paid to ever greater efficiency and value for money in the introduction of change. Tolerance for methods which do not deliver learning and change within reasonable time frames and budgets is dwindling rapidly. Above all, there is an increasing demand for methods which produce organizational self sufficiency.

This is one reason for including the paper on the difference between PD and STS. STS for sociotechnical systems is now enshrined as a *method*, particularly in the USA. But it is the old method used by social scientists in the experimental phase, to establish that joint

optimization of social and technical systems constituted an alternative to autocracy (a sociotechnical system without joint optimization).

STS as a method is an inefficient and expensive method of introducing the change of design principle, and actually fails to explicitly educate about the design principles.

When awareness of the design principles is lacking, various Human Relations type methods can produce unstable pseudo solutions, such as changing the role of the supervisor. That this translation of the supervisor from 'cop to coach' (TLC - Trainer, Leader and Coach) is popular is an indication that it is the easy option, i.e., it doesn't change the design principle and the location of responsibility for co-ordination and control.

The paper 'Management by Objectives' contains a table setting out the differences between organizations designed on the two principles. The extent and mutual exclusivity of these justifies describing them as separate organizational paradigms.

There are plenty of organizations, however, which are taking a fundamental approach to change and it is particularly for these organizations that this edition contains the papers by Fred Emery focusing on management after the change to democratic structures. As he argues, those who are currently managers must also be prepared for major changes in the content and amount of 'management' as well as radically changed relationships within management and between management and other levels of a self managing, non-dominant hierarchy. The underlying theme is that when organizations change from design principle 1 to design principle 2, the change is *systemic*. It cannot be sustained merely as a change on the shop floor, or even to middle management.

In 'Matching Effectivities to Affordances in the Design of Jobs', Emery (F) explores the six psychological job requirements of work (not necessarily paid employment) within the framework of ecological psychology, thereby enlarging our understanding of these basic factors, and tying more closely the design and epistemological dimensions of organizational change.

There were two other papers in this section of the 1993 edition, both vitally concerned about the confusion of laissez-faire and DP2. As more work has been done on this subject since then, these papers have been incorporated into a new section dealing specifically with laissez-faire and its ramifications.