

Listening Post – seminar 11 January 2010 Finland

By The Metanoia Institute and The Finnish Society for Organisational Dynamics FINOD

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Participants: 11 persons

Seminar Report

In the participants' descriptions of their circumstances and feelings, several connected themes appeared whose contents and mutual associations were experienced as difficult to describe in words. A person's worry about his or her position arose as a joint denominator – personal and social identity – social disturbance continually accelerating.

Theme 1: A person's apprehension about his or her identity as social turbulence accelerates

Sub-theme A: Experienced loss of control over one's life and the subsequent insecurity and horror.

Analysis

The participants reported a continuous need to maintain a fast pace, visible and invisible demands, and mutual competition in their environment. There was no time for things that would add real meaning to life and bring joy. The most disturbing was their lack of strength to think and reflect on what was happening. Their mental status was coloured by exhaustion and a continual feeling of inadequacy since they did not have enough time or were not able to do what they should. Deep emotion became a problem when they felt that they had not met the expectations of others. They felt disappointment when others thought only of themselves. There was a general belief that, since everyone else was also involved in the same rat race, there had been a widespread increase in selfishness. People are becoming ensnared in a vicious circle in which no one has time for others or for listening to others. Therefore, everyone remains without the understanding and support that they need. A feeling of insecurity is spreading, and feelings of absurdity are increasing. People's lives are not in their own hands.

Extreme feelings of having lost control over one's life were reported to appear in situations in which actions meant to support a client were outsourced to others or to technology, for example, mechanically operated robots such as answering machines and other information equipment that is too complex for its users. Services offered to clients may appear to be well produced, but, when used in a biased or faulty system, they can leave clients without the things they actually need. When "encounters" have no dialogue, a person looking for understanding and answers to questions is left hanging. With technology's replacement of people, compassionate encounters and the need to be heard grow.

Hypothesis. The experience of having fallen into a situation of helplessness sends the message of a break down in the control over one's life. It threatens the entity of a person's identity and awakens horror (psychological death). A feeling of helplessness can take people by surprise and may, therefore, be a new experience. In losing autonomy, people experience humiliation when they are forced to recognize their dependency on the outside world. At a deeper level, they have always known of their dependency. It can be seen, for example, in the scrambling for money and power. Such scrambling is a "preventive measure" for averting such a dependent situation. But focussing on the accrument of money and power leads to the aforementioned vicious circle. Real dialogue and collaboration are replaced by competition in which all parties are left alone.

Sub-theme B: Experienced loss of trust

Analysis

In the descriptions of turbulence experienced within the viscous circle, the most humiliating and scariest experiences seemed to occur in situations related to a loss of trust and the ability to solve problems that people meet on both the individual and collective level. These situations not only take away trust, but also a person's own ability to survive. If a loss of trust affects all of mankind, a person experiences total deception. Enduring such a situation can be devastating. For example, with respect to a collapse in trust on the collective level, environmental problems were mentioned. A dependence on technology that has gone too far and technical systems whose "collapse" would create a wholly new type of catastrophe were mentioned as new threats. Our culture seems to have advanced so far that people have lost their connection with nature. It has detached itself from reality and created a simulated reality. Instead of having natural relationships, people form unnatural relationships that estrange them from their natural basic needs. Life is filled with emptiness, which then must be filled somehow artificially. According to the participants, we are on the edge of a breach. The entire world is changing as the environment moulds people and people, in turn, mould it.

Hypothesis: Animals' instincts provide a sufficient basis for their lives. For people, this is not so. In place of instincts, people have developed brains with which they can think. They can use their power to reason. In contrast to animals, people need the help of other people. This need provides a possibility for people to use their ability to use language. People are not only natural corporal products, but are also cultural beings for whom sociality is a requirement for life. The ability to create a culture is, at the same time, both possible and risky, since the activity has both planned and unplanned results. When trust in people's ability to solve all problems is extended too far, the ecological balance is threatened, and we are alienated from our basic humanity, our natural state. Because culture is an artefact, a product produced by humans, the alienation of people from nature also takes culture further and further from natural life. And the further culture progresses, the more difficult it is for a person to establish a connection with an authentic natural life. People are left alone in the void they have created.

Theme 2: Integrative and destructive strategies

Analysis

The need to hurry hampers a person's listening and thinking; a continuous need to hurry brings about a deficit of self-reflection and dialogue. The link between both a person's own and other's basic needs disappears. In addition, the need to hurry breaks down the ability to distinguish between the essential and the non-essential, important futility. People slip away from reality, their own humanity. When, in mutual interaction, people produce an additional need for others to hurry, life's turbulence increases. Some persons have more social turbulence in their relationships than others do.

A person's means of making life easier is to produce technical aids to facilitate their actions. In this respect, there has been success for the most part, but, as an unexpected by-product, technology has weakened the connection through which living beings listen to, and are heard by, others. In this manner, a strategy that is meant to help is transformed into something that destroys.

A person's need to be connected to others maintains a pressure to keep up also socially, and it produces more indisposition than well-being. The stronger the bond, the fewer the number of persons who trust their own ability to find a better lifestyle somewhere else, in some other way.

Hypothesis: A tightening of the tension between dependency and independency creates extreme solutions first for the individual and then at the collective level. Most people attempt to adjust to the manic activity of society because it provides the feeling of being present. But the price is a loss of a person's own autonomy and alienation from reality. At the collective level, the question is, for the most part, a defence against anxiety. The lost connection with reality is compensated by a simulated reality. Culture creates several realities and simulated realities according to the type of strategies the individual uses to survive. At one extremity of turbulence are the leaders of culture and their followers. At the other are those who have freed themselves of turbulence. For some it has been a necessity, and for others it was voluntary. The former group is comprised of those who have fallen to the outskirts of society (C citizens), who have not managed to persevere. The latter group is formed by those who have made a voluntary choice. They have succeeded to retain their autonomy and personal identity. They still trust their own thoughts and, through the help of these thoughts, have the ability to find a supporting foundation for life. A possible new turn in society is dependent on these people because they have succeeded to "keep their feet on the ground", saved a connection with reality, and have the ability to use their own brains.