



# **participatory Methodology**

October/2011

## ***Administration and activities management.***

The current thought on organizational management is that these organizations must adjust to the environment in which they work. Workplaces and working groups of all types have adopted practices that depend on and foster flexibility, teamwork, workplace democracy and initiative.

More and more, old methods of management, characterized by hierarchical structures and management are being replaced by formats that value autonomy, the ability to influence decision-making, and adaptation.

Workplace democracy implies the consultation of all parties involved in the workplace. The application of the methodology of participatory administration and teamwork has an effect greater than a change in process; it signals an essential shift in power. When management adopts principles of workplace democracy, it is prioritizing a more transparent exercise of power and a more equitable distribution of power.

Participatory management methods may succeed in a better distribution of decision-making power; but it is a process that is, by its nature, slower than a more centrally controlled process. One objective of workplace democracy is to promote learning and development because of participation in the process. In the end, the attainment of this objective can become more important than arriving at a conclusive decision on the question at hand.

In the process of making choices and decisions people engage in mutual learning, experiencing differences, conflicts and clashes. Aside from being a slower process, participatory management methods demand knowledge and competence for the process to have effective results. *Knowledge is information interpreted and placed in context, and competence is this distilled knowledge directed toward the fulfillment of targeted goals.* (5) Participation in a decision-making process without knowledge competence, is not effective participation, it is irresponsibility.

The question is how to apply participatory methodology effectively while accepting that these tactics tend to be slow and demanding?

### **Some reflections**

- Members of organizations that propose employing participatory management have to be aware of the added demands this implies. The functioning of these organizations requires members to be open and transparent about their specific job functions, and about their general activities, within the organization. Multi-functionality on the part of members is very important, but does not mean that “everybody does a little of everything”. It means that every member has to be informed and aware of the organization's whole range of institutional activities.

The organization's work environment should stimulate and favor individual self-regulation and autonomy, assisted by the use of cross-organization coordination tools. In a critical situation where a team leader takes on an autocratic role, he/she is encouraging a vertical coordination of efforts, discouraging teamwork and a mutual learning process. In this hierarchical arrangement, true participation becomes virtually impossible, members are reduced to validating decisions to which leaders have already given their blessing. However, it is important to note that frequent meetings are not always synonymous with participative management, although meetings are part of the process. Participatory management takes place beyond the development of programs - it is important to ensure that everybody participates and commits themselves from the planning stage through to the evaluation of the initiative results.

Participatory management is only possible if those who exercise leadership do not consider the idea of driving or persuading others as their preeminent tool. The leader, in a participatory management context, has the responsibility to promote learning, interact and mediate debates and conflicts. In this sense, leadership requires a learning about oneself, others and about the organizational context in a continuous interaction and exchange with and among all involved.

## **In the Study Groups**

### **Participatory Methodology in the Learning Process, or Collaborative Learning**

Collaborative learning is one of the most important components of an effective educational strategy. With an emphasis on group interaction facilitators or moderators are required to create mutual learning situations.

This collaborative strategy is especially useful when participants are adults with diverse experiences knowledge and interests. Collaborative or participatory learning allows the individual to attain personal goals in concert with the goals of the collective.

JASSG's Study Groups "provide the opportunity to share knowledge, without depriving any member of the group of their sense of individuality and of individual power. Knowledge and experience have this particular quality: all of us become considerably richer when we share them.

*"The use of the terms "course" and "training" give the impression that there will be a professor or instructor talking to a room of students not a "two way" process of sharing knowledge and experience, but a "one way" process: from the teacher or instructor to the student." (4)*

This "one –way" model is not compatible with what we seek to do in JASSG.

### **Some of the concepts that support collaborative learning or participatory methodology in education.**

*"Education is a developmental process in which the human being, born unskilled, dependent and incapable of taking responsibility for one's life becomes a competent being, independent and responsible, and in due time, achieves fulfillment, in personal, professional and social aspects. This process is essential for the survival of the non-parasitic human being - and goes beyond that. Humans have a relatively open nature, which allows us to define - to a large extent - what we want to do with our lives, i.e. what we want to become. This is the reason we set or choose life projects that help us a level of achieve*

*personal fulfillment that goes far beyond simple survival. This is how we exercise what we consider free will.*

*Although born unskilled, dependent and incapable of taking responsibility for our lives, we are born with an incredible ability to learn: it is what makes education possible.*

*Education takes place both inside outside of the school, and throughout life.*

*Learning does not mean simply absorbing and accumulating information: learning is a transformational process of becoming capable of doing what one could not do before. The learning process is something eminently active (interactive, participatory, collaborative, etc..), related above all to "doing" - not mechanical, mindless participation, but as a conscious act, a consequence of a intentional decision-making and driven by freely chosen goals.*

*This very real form of learning is something that is not generally encouraged by teachers/instructors, in a school context, where "savoir-faire" is more important. Instructors actively encourage this process - admittedly, not alone, but in concert with other teachers and instructors and with the institution" (4)*

## **Leadership**

Many people are confused by the concepts of leadership and management. First, to understand the concept of leadership depends on defining some terms correctly: horizontal hierarchy, delegation of power, democracy as opposed to "facade democracy".

Horizontal hierarchy: this method of administration seeks to minimize the distance between decision makers subordinates.

Delegation of power: a person who knows how to delegate will not let their position occlude their ability to make decisions. They will feel safe in their position without becoming attached to it. They are not afraid of losing the job/ or position.

Democracy, as opposed to "facade democracy": democracies need leaders. while facade democracies do not. Democracy does not require full consultation with all organization members on all particular details, related to a decision-making process.

A leader must have the ability to fully engage a problem, to share details with their team and, while also being willing to assume the responsibilities for resolving the problem. Although many people think otherwise, a leader is generally expected to assume "hands on" approach. This attitude does not diminish or denigrate role of the leader. A leader can be a role model, providing an example of commitment to the success and an example of how to act in similar situations. (7)

Sources:

1. Freinet, Celestin – In: Pedagogia do bom-senso.
2. Freire, Paulo – In: Educação e Mudança
3. Fundação Emílio Odebrecht -Travassos, Mari e outros – In: Metodologia Participativa na Criação de Material Educativo com Adolescentes
4. Instituto Lumiar – In: Declaração de Princípios e Proposta Pedagógica
5. Rodrigues, Andréa Leite – Revista Integração. In: Gestão Participativa em Organizações: Mitos, Possibilidades e Desafios.
6. Semler, Ricardo – In: Virando a própria Mesa.
7. Upsys.org – Lideranças em empresas. In: Dicas práticas