Creative-motivational workshops / workgroups

Content

C-level, or lower level, workshop facilitation, oriented to team-building, problem solving / innovation, learning / change (targets should be defined according to the opportunity to be pursued and the participant characteristics).

Peculiarities

Competent, "diverse" and "eager" participants must be selected.

A "radical" approach will be adopted:

- "Doing the same", even if an improved way, would be pointless;
- "Reinventing" is much better, according to the opportunity (an example of free / ad hoc choice is the time frame: from half a day to six months...).

Sessions are led with two further characteristics, compared to "traditional" teamwork:

- "Almost psychoanalytic listening" by the facilitator towards the team (and induced by the facilitator among the participants): founding teamwork on "deep listening" – by everybody towards everybody else – allows to achieve unforeseeable results...;
- Knowledge / experiences of the facilitator about the subject of the workshop (which are however "hidden", as much as possible, from the team) or, to the contrary (when the facilitator is new to the subject matter), capability to foster the individual participant's learning, and/or the learning of the team as a whole.

The only shady aspect: if a workshop does *not* work, it tends to highlight the organizational / cultural constraints which are bringing it to failure. This limitation should represent an extra value, but this isn't true in an absolute sense. As there are situations in which a workshop-based approach can be the best way to achieve change, so there are other situations in which making truth emerge – "the king is naked!" – might *not* be the best choice.
Shortly, everything must be decided / managed with great care, if some basic conditions might not be met...

Experiences

Banco di Roma; Banca d'America e d'Italia (later acquired by Deutsche Bank); Barilla

Since the beginning of his consulting experience (1983), the facilitator always interpreted a consulting engagement as a joint learning course between the consulting team and the client team.
This approach became conscious, explicit – and eventually "documented" – in the first reengineering projects (Banco di Roma's domestic Treasury, 1987; Banca d'America e d'Italia's teller operations, 1989-90; Barilla's operations, 1994-95): in 1997 an article was published on Economia & Management, *"Reingegnerizzazione come apprendimento - Un modo radicalmente diverso per perseguire opportunità"* ("Learning-based reengineering - A radically different way of pursuing opportunities").
The redesign of Barilla's operations could well be considered a consulting benchmark (and the workshop the only way to achieve the results obtained): instead of a 4 consultant team for 12

months (a sensible hypothesis, given the usual consulting approaches), *1 consultant only for 5 months* (with a client team of 11 "diverse" people); instead of 100€m/y identified savings, of which 75 achieved (another sensible hypothesis), *80€m/y identified savings and 150 achieved.*

The facilitator had the opportunity of actually "living" – and (re)invent by self teaching – what is indicated in three "classical" books (not necessarily written before his experiences...):

- "The Fifth Discipline", by Peter Senge: *"mental models", "group learning", "systemic view", "shared vision"*;
- "The Wisdom of Teams", by Katzenbach and Dough: *"real team", "exceptional team"*;
- "Reengineering the Corporation", by Hammer and Champy: all the tools for a radical change, with *something more*:
  - In Banco di Roma, *info flow-based IT specs*;
  - In Banca d'America e d'Italia, *flexible IT*;
  - In Barilla, *continued learning after the end of the project*.

Istituto di Ricerca Internazionale

A very short workshop (45 minutes) was facilitated within a convention with a number of separate sessions. To that occasional workshop, led without any specific preparation, was awarded *the prize for the best workshop of the year*.

SKF

Some short workshops on reengineering were led. In the first edition two interesting facts happened (one was prepared, but not the other):

- It was decided to let participants "live" the experience – and the related fear – of the white page, before leaving room to clarifications;
- When later a participant said "I can't understand; I feel stupid...", the others were asked whether they would take care of their colleague's, to help him understand. In the immediate following of the session everybody had the opportunity to "experimentally" understand the meaning and the value of "being a team".

Passini Group (second world manufacturer of s.c. "undercarriage components")

Again a workshop-like approach was used to lead the reorganization of the Group, sum of a small entrepreneurial company and a large former state-owned company, managed(?) by a first line of command literally "in disaster" (of three managers: one severely ill, one on the way out, one without any trust by the company owner):

- In these conditions, without "raw material" for a redefinition of the organizational positions, an organizational redesign was started on a novel basis. *The first phase – workshop-based, process-oriented and managed "from below" (1998) – involved the second line of management in sharing the design, thereby consciously assuming the related managerial and operating responsibilities.* After 5 months of work, all the signs for a real "miracle" were present (given the initial conditions);
- At the end of 1998, the Group acquires (without money...) a large German company, thereby having new (foreign) managers available. The second phase – traditionally led (...organizational "boxes") against the facilitator's advice – succeeded in diluting the laboriously generated motivation in the former state-owned ranks and to defer by years the solution of the Group's problems (a good example of how *not* to make things happen...).

<u>FIAT Automotive</u>

Two "experimental" workshops were led ...and the occasion of facilitating another one, of crucial importance to the company, was lost:

- The third of three workshops was facilitated:
  - The workshops were started in parallel (two days a week for a couple of months), to generate "innovative sustainable ideas" in: marketing / distribution; manufacturing / logistics; product development;
  - In each workshop, 20 "high potential" people participated, led by three facilitators with different approaches.
- Three different results were obtained:
  - The marketing / distribution group produced "set" of ideas,
  - The production / logistics group delivered a coherent and organic framework of ideas,
  - The product development group proposed a series of *really innovative ideas* and showed a "tangible" team building (possibly perceived by FIAT – maybe it was the first time for them to see a real team... – as the key part of the proposals put forward).
- Another workshop was facilitated to demonstrate the feasibility of an accelerated product design. This project had only *partial* success, due to acknowledged missing sponsorship. However, it highlighted some organizational-cultural, FIAT-specifc limitations (first and foremost, a deeply rooted refusal of innovation);
- A set of workshops, oriented to renew the company approach to leadership was proposed and approved (in times before Morchio and Marchionne), cancelled later on after September 11. *The second line of management (60 people) should first define and then illustrate to the first line of command (15 people) their vision about how the leadership within FIAT Automotive should be characterized...*

Synthesis

The offered workshop facilitation is partly educational, partly provocative; neither too intruding, nor too delicate; balanced between hard and soft issues; very effective (besides fast) to make comprehensive changes happen in "positive but blocked" situations.

For situations in which *positive sides are missing altogether*, most likely other tools are needed. Organizing a workshop would anyway be a useful for a last, sound attempt to unblock a static situation – in case it, against any prediction, should succeed – or to provide – should it fail – a tangible reason for other types of intervention.

Deliverables / results

In case of success:

- Team building / group learning;
- Deep problem solving / systemic view;
- Clarity / transparency / focus;
- Shared vision / "automatic" deployment coordination;
- Energy / motivation;
- Capability of keeping to search for opportunities.

In case of failure:

- Cultural and/or organizational "blocking" reasons / mechanisms made explicit.

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