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"PLANNING VIABLE PARTNERSHIPS AND

HUMAN CENTERED INTERVENTIONS"

"A new approach to knowledge and management"

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"A new approach to knowledge and management"

Without knowledge there can be no development

Faced with its own set of challenges and realities of this century, is the north equipped to transfer knowledge and train effectively the African people of today?

The new environment and the dynamics of the 21st century must be approached from a fresh perspective, free of old paradigms, if we are to meet the challenges of this new era. Globalization, the on-going continued revolution in the information and technology fields, are but a few of these new dynamics. These coupled with recession, unemployment and conflicts, add to the complexity of the problem.

As the complexity of our systems and societies increase, many individuals, organizations, and governments are experiencing the fears of instability, anxiety and inability to confront this challenging but un-predictable era. Competition is tougher and more intense, and we are obliged to rapidly increase our pace in the race for the discovery of new business opportunities, innovation, accomplishment of preset targets and the expansion of influence. Technology has advanced rapidly, but have our training and management skills, done so? Are we still using the best policies in terms of training and employment?

A critical paradigm shift is required in the area of knowledge, training and management to apply effective policies. New organic approaches to knowledge and change management are imperative in order to assist the people of today acquire and implement 21st century skills in order for them to succeed.

The practice of today requires that colleagues and subordinates of organizations, businesses etc. be motivated in order for them to accept the unique and universal truth of **"best practice"**, meaning *the one and only rational and efficient way* that things must be done, according to the plan. It is the plan that laboratory experts and technocrats have created as the overall solution; the cost-benefit based recipe, which simply, should be implemented correctly by the populations of the application fields.

But, as life proves, most of the time, humans decide, choose and act in an irrational way, using patterns instead of multi-criteria analysis. These patterns have been shaped through their individual and collective life and work experience; which are related to their inherent personal and collective systems of values and reflect their personal and collective culture. They operate as perception filters for a reality that is no longer unique and objective, but consists of many contradictory and antagonistic parts.

This phenomenon is more intense in transition times, like nowadays, when strategic goals for local development and peripheral change obtain different meaning among the various stakeholders; everybody talks about consensus, but in fact polarities dominate under a veil of conventionality.

Furthermore, as time goes by and experience builds up, people tend to make a greater investment in labeling systems, so conservative biases are being built in order to give us confidence; this common single-sided approach leads to ephemeral stereotypes, which compete with one another. Thus, plans, interventions and actions, all taken in good faith, not only fail to resolve an existing situation, but quite often magnify the problem or make it more intractable.

Policy planners should be aware of these critical issues, as they are expected to decide upon effective policies and efficient investments that could enforce the triptych of **flexibility – security – quality,** desired by the businesses, the employees and the consumers.

We could indicate at least four different types of traps that threaten decision makers and project leaders.

- **First, is their tendency to adopt without adaptation** (*copy – paste - download*) the superficial formalities of success stories, derived from a different context.

- Second, the **overwhelming influence of their own patterns** that blind them when facing an emerging need for change, thus failing to feel the spirit of the times and the real maturity for innovation or reform.

- Third, the **current dominating mechanistic assumption of life,** taken for a linear procedure of firm stages and expected deliverables.

Finally, as consequence of all the above, ensuing problems are created that influence social coherence and the local society's web by the formalistic imitation of intruding fads and lifestyles, often falsely declared as developmental and growth initiatives.

Experience shows us that such approaches do not cure the problem and there are some good reasons for that.

- **the myth of control:** organizations and individuals feel control slipping from their grasp and their natural reaction is to become even more intransigent in their attempt to clamp down on events and exert ever more control; the result is a spiral of control that has literally gone out of control

- t**he stakeholders are involved only in implementing the change and not in the process of designing the change**, consequently they may not actually understand the necessity of the change, thus when the effort fails they turn into greater mistrust or apathy

- t**he experts, in order to standardize alternative scenarios for forthcoming situations,** usually assume that humans can, and will act rationally, based on criteria such as **cost** (to minimize) and **benefit** (to maximize); but quite often, humans decide on an unexpected way, so the whole plan goes in vain

- t**he problem solving and defect correction concept leads to secondary problems**, such as of de-energizing the participants, draining the organizational vitality, failing to substitute the creative thinking and ignoring the soulful aspect of organizational change

Eventually, these linear mechanical approaches increase the gap between the existing attitudes and the real requirements of a global economy. Over the last decade a few alternative theories and paradigms have been developed in management landscape. They outline new organic approaches in knowledge and change management (both in policy formation and in operational decision making), arguing that human groups need to be effective, while the machines and the standard interactions (like manufacturing processes or the appreciation of rules) need to be efficient.

According to them, in the organizations' environment value equally and inseparably both measurable (gender, race, age, class, organizational structures, strategic goals etc) and non-measurable (hopes, dreams, feelings, ideas, talents, creative tensions, impulses, power struggles, jealousy etc) aspects of reality; all of these facets together can be seen as an indivisible reality, enabling a more complete and comprehensive picture of an organization.

All these approaches recognize the important role of narrative and storytelling, indicating that they have little to do with solving the problem directly, but to change the relationships people have with the problems, helping them to see the whole of it. People connect by telling each other stories revealing their experience, potentialities and desires; they tell parts of their stories to themselves, about who they are, what happened to them, what they want and what they can and cannot do.

Stories exist in all groups, organizations, and communities, delivering complex ideas in a simple, consistent, and memorable way; if they arise naturally they can reflect the underlying values, operating principles and beliefs that are the real culture of that community.

All of these stories use archetypes; as people tell and retell stories about their environment, their beliefs and values as expressed through the characters within those stories gradually become more and more extreme, until each character individually represents one aspect of that culture, and collectively the characters and the stories that reveal those characters provide a profound set of cultural indicators.

There is a wide range of uses of archetypes today: as a representation of culture, as a means for understanding customers or for branding, as a means of bringing together two cultures (including merger and acquisition), as a representation of multiple situations for strategy planning, as a means to index oral history databases etc.

Today, some very powerful techniques and tools have been developed and operating today worldwide with remarkable results. They use large volumes of source narrative material, from which they extract archetypal personas, values and issues that can inform policy, strategy and direction about the real maturity of the given context. The output is lead to special databases, enabling knowledge access and permitting content indexing through this use.

Thus they create a new communication code between the stakeholders, a new contextual language and vocabulary, easy to understand and use, not only by the experts but also by the ordinary people. Further, they enable the understanding of one's own stereotypes and biases, along with the potentials, for individuals to contribute to the breakthrough of the usual contradictions and paradoxes that form part of social complexity.

In conclusion, policy / decision makers and project planners would be in a position to:

- **Make sense of the active patterns of the specific context and thus make better estimations about the results and the consequences of the policy or project**

- **Choose and plan in time measures, compatible with these patterns, in order to meet the goals and face the consequences**

- **Create the proper attractors, in order to engage the active participation of the stakeholders and eventually the success of the investment / project to be implemented.**

EURONET (NGDO) is collaborating with European and international networks, specialised **in the new generation of knowledge and change management tools.** We plan and promote this kind of innovative projects in the fields of technology and know-how transfer, sustainable planning, entrepreneurial empowerment and vocational training.

Some of these projects have a dual character; although they could be seen as preparatory stages of other large-scale interventions in new markets, such as Africa, they can also be dealt as stand alone project with excellent business results.

Among those, we would like to mention the ***Knowledge Campus*** project, which combines **the Summer School concept and the Narratives project idea.**

Knowledge Campus project is about planning and establishing an ecologically friendly campus, in a safe and attractive environment; there, people from selected target groups will enjoy a 2-weeks period of seminars, related to their preferable thematic topics, such as entrepreneurship, ecology, culture, health, creativity, leadership, etc.

In the same time, the participants will share stories and participate in experiential and state of the art workshops, where they will process this narrative material gathered and share

knowledge; this will enable them to understand themselves as well as others and eventually learn to communicate more effectively.

The output of the whole event will be measurable and non measurable, as there will be elements which are not visible or easily assessed. Either way the benefit will be evident.

The first one will be the Knowledge Base of the Campus, containing these deeper characteristics that operate as guiding forces in the social context of the participants; on that level it will operate as a gnostic tool, aiming to support evolving (learning) organizations, in their quest to adapt, transform and survive.

The second type of output will be the participants' overall satisfaction for the experience of unity and non-separateness, within this surrounding; which will be the catalytic factor that will make them ambassadors of this business and of the country that will host it.

Concluding, we should mention that our members are working on this idea since 1998, when they planned and implemented (for the first time in Greece) a pilot summer school program for secondary students, on behalf of the Greek Ministry of Education.

Since then, our members have developed more the idea and the content of the summer schools and merged it with entrepreneurial aspects and the **"knowledge through narratives"** concept. **This summer we had the opportunity to test our efforts in a much larger scale; participating in the consortium that won the international contest for the *Entrepreneurial Summer Schools,* proclaimed by the same Ministry in Greece, we managed the implementation of a new program, related more with entrepreneurship, which was addressed to 600 students all over Greece. The innovative element we plan to propose for next year's application will be the above mentioned powerful combination of knowledge and narratives!**

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