

## THE PLACE WHERE WE LEARN TO TRUST OUR IDEAS

*About the summer camp for individuals and organizations incorporated in the Quality Movement. Those who approach their work as a craft were confused, those who are able to dream received plenty of precious ideas and insights.*

Reporting on an educational meeting imposes several restriction on the writer, the style of writing and omission of the emotional dimension of the experience. To write about the camp I wish to report on in this manner is simply not possible without distorting it, without distorting our experience.

### A summer camp for all

In August 2007 the Summer Camp of the European organization for quality EOQ was held in Slovenia, organized by the BE-I Institute. We “camped” at the hotel at Brdo by Kranj, our stay, dedicated to the issue of quality management, was in many ways not unlike that of scouts, only a great deal more comfortable and, above all, freer. “The aim of the summer camp is to meet interesting people: young and old, experienced and inexperienced. It is a community where many opportunities may occur. It is a place where new ideas come to life and are accepted with joy as they are exchanged between members.

The organizers and moderators **Mila Božič, Danilo Kozoderc, Aleš Čerin** and other wished the camp to provide space for people from various fields and professions, who are open-minded and able to mix freely, talking, learning and undergoing transformation in an atmosphere that inspires trust and is free of coercion. For this purpose they employed the “Open Space and Open Mind Method”, an approach reminiscent of Carl Rogers’s indirective method of learning. The second principle, the “Law of Two Legs”, as it was juicily named, released us from the constricting ties we are even not fully aware of.

### What is the connection between the “Law of Two Legs” and quality and innovations

At the opening of the camp we were told that whenever we felt we were not motivated any longer by a lecture or by a group discussion, whenever we longed to have a cup of coffee or perhaps to take a nap, we were free to show it. In an atmosphere of trust nobody would be offended even if we really did it. Another rule introduced at the camp was that you could stand up in the middle of a lecture and demand attention and play a CD or do something else – if you really thought this was what you ought to do. It turned out that the interruptions made almost as a rule made sense and were of such nature that they unobtrusively fit into the programme or else there was not made at all. Free people are inquisitive people!

In the programme the Slovene participants, **Samo Fakin, Joško Čuk, Danica Purg, Rajka Bračun and Dušana Findeisen**, presented, in four afternoon sessions, some of the Slovenian achievements in the field of establishment of new organizations and processes: organizations created from ideas, confidence, a firm intention to effect change and achieve quality. It was important - although this showed only later, as at the outset the camp did not have any firm preconceived goals, only some themes– that *transformative learning of individuals and the community*, emerging when organizations of this type are being created, should surface. Several presentations were given by foreign professionals from among the participants.

**Shoji Shiba**, a man who has received as a writer and educator world-wide recognition for his work in the field of management and management quality. The Bologna process was another issue discussed critically by the camp participants, primarily of course from the viewpoint of management and quality. The university will not be able to manage adequately such a great number of processes without possessing knowledge of quality management. New processes cannot be introduced without considering the relationship between them and other processes, without lending ear to both, students and professors. The Dean and other people heading a faculty should learn a great deal about quality management.

In the discussion groups about *transformative learning, healthcare, respect of global cultures* work was done in a special way. Let me skip the already traditional ice-breaking techniques, aimed at indicating a common way of thinking, and move to the manner of *gathering impressions* after lectures. “What do you remember? What has touched you? “One was not obliged to answer; nevertheless the majority put a note with a thought on the magnetic board. We rearranged these thoughts into clusters - again only those among us who wanted to - and each added an idea to each new cluster. We would stand up – or not – and add something. Since all the participants were thinking, analytical people of diverse backgrounds, the discussions on transformative learning and informal learning, on the transformation of the individual and society and the broader effects of education were stimulating. For me, who am overconcerned about final definitions, concepts and theories, the analytical reasoning of others – pharmacists, physicists, economists, doctors, university lecturers of various professions, architects etc. – was extremely precious. It is understandable that my knowledge should be rather more thematical, rounded up, structured, that I “know” and am acquainted with theories; the same knowledge and the same conceptualizations may, however, occasionally become a burden. They are not alive, quite the contrary, they are cut from life. And so I was told that we absolutely depend on a system, that we can receive responses to our work only within a system and that this is a prerequisite for learning. Adult education theorists would word this idea differently; however, put in this way, it made it immediately clear to everybody that once you are retired you cannot just learn as if for fun - if there is no response to what you are doing, if you do not have access to an environment in which your learning is considered a value and appreciated and in which your knowledge will get enriched. **Shoji Shiba** stated, for instance, that we tend to dwell too much on the results of learning, predetermining them, as we hold a preconceived idea of what they should be. But does this make sense if learning is such a very personal thing?

## **What was said and, in particular, how it was said**

Education is expensive, there are many obstacles: lack of motivation and lack of understanding. What works? We should begin to learn together. All in the same place! The teacher recognizes difficulties and guides us with questions. The process should be divided into short “rounds”, followed by verification. It is important there should be contacts between individuals. A degree of pressure also helps. Interactive learning contains many methods for large groups. The actual beginning of the teaching process is work on motivation... To be motivated, students need a goal. The old method: the teacher speaks, the students listen, should be changed. The Bologna process goes back to the seventies, so do its concepts. The university is expected to be ahead of the society in many aspects; however, what we have actually been offered is old subjects in new clothes. Processes are not interconnected. The university must be improved at two levels: in the processes of management and identification of aims and the people involved, in knowing what can be expected. Will universities open up? How can other organizations affect the Bologna process? Teaching is arrogant; it is possible to teach somebody something only they wish it. The learning environment should stimulate all senses. To like a topic is imperative. What is needed are the right steps made in the right way. Peer influence on learning is great. Attention is required and the environment must be transformed with knowledge. Informal learning is prevailing, so it should be allowed to enter the sphere of formal higher education.

In the healthcare section there were discussions about contradictory statements. In healthcare we are interested in systemic analyses, in many things that are on the other end or at the end of the line, but, alas, we tend to forget the patient, quality of treatment, etc.

In the camp there were also young people, even children; they had their own section, because the young should find mentors in the experienced adults and because they should be allowed to enter the grown-up world with their own ideas. They reflected on the protection and value of the environment. “Nobody is old enough to be wise enough, and nobody is young enough to be less wise than he could be” was their slogan.

Later, a professor told me during our conversation that he had a mentor who used to open doors for him. Today, this mentor is eighty years old and still regularly writes him, at least four times a month, and this man’s mentor, who will shortly be a hundred years old, is also still writing him. Every year this professor chooses one from among his students and takes him along to conferences, exchanges his views with him, talks to him about what he is reading, what he is thinking about, and gives him his full attention. He leads correspondence with him and stimulates him to read, think and act. “Correspondence is very important”, he said, “Because it makes us formulate our ideas differently ... so they remain.” Why have we teachers forgotten about the teacher’s role in the ancient Greece, the role of mentor, leader, and guide ... in knowledge and in life? Why have we, for instance, consigned into oblivion the Jewish “houses of learning”, where the teachers used to live together with their pupils, who could raise all kind of questions, and life-long bonds were woven between them?

## **Open space for people of open mind**

When I felt like it, if someone I was interested in came by, I simply sat down with them and started a conversation. I was interested, for example, how to assure quality in a factory where the majority of workers are functionally illiterates. Functional illiteracy is not just a consequence, it is not only what is obvious; more importantly, it is what the functionally illiterate person is hiding, as if he was afflicted by plague, what really worries him. He is ashamed and will do everything so as not to be discovered. He will find excuses and say that he does not have his glasses on him and ask his workmate to read him the instructions he does not understand. He will not be able to write a report on his work. He will not be able to say what he does in his job and what part of the whole process it represents. So of course he will not understand what quality is in the eyes of the customer ... And if there are changes in the company, this person will get worried, he will hide his deficiencies and will go on working as before regardless of the instructions he has received ... he will generate costs, the quality of his work will not be acceptable... Yet, this person is precious: he works hard, is reliable, never late, never on sick leave ... always available. How to identify the functionally illiterate workers and what to do in a changing organization? They belong to the old type of manufacture, where it was the force of muscles that counted and they were not expected to think about mistakes, improvements...

**Bertrand Jouslin de Noray**, Secretary General of the European Quality Organization answered my question with an analogy, the issue of the handicapped who, like the functionally illiterate, also have problems with adaptation to work processes. The company has to create possibilities for informal relationships and, especially, for rituals, during which people can connect themselves with others in a predictable and emotionally safe manner. Such a ritual is, for example, coffee-making, where the division of tasks connects the socially isolated with the others – coffee machines should be avoided by all means! - during this process one should carry on conversation with them, lead it to everyday matters, for example, the baker and what takes to make good bread, then one should turn back and talk about their work, their role in the company. Because to know means to put the details of knowledge into a context and to understand the principles, to generalize knowledge. Until a person is able to do this, he or she is functionally illiterate and represents an obstacle for achievement of quality.

And what else assures quality and what is quality management for him? It used to mean primarily control, reduction of the number of rejects; today it is primarily know-how of crisis management. The person in charge must have a firm sense and purpose. Purposefulness is a psychological state - unrepeatability ... If we have a purpose, we have to realise it here and now, said **Bertrand Jouslin de Noray**, because tomorrow it will be gone.

## **In next summer camp - no electricity**

Next camp of the healthcare section will be held in Switzerland next year, on a country estate high in the mountains, where the latest technology and the traditional way of cow-milking co-exist. Sometimes there will be electricity, sometimes not. “How are we going to dry our hair?” moaned the Americans. “You won’t need to, you won’t be washing either. Well, perhaps, in a spring. Do you know how to? If not, this is what you are going to learn in this learning environment. The subject of discussion in this camp will be – how to preserve our roots.

## **Conclusion**

Let me use in my conclusion the final thoughts of **Bertrand Jouslin de Noray**: “... the main lesson is that we have to move from a world of doctors, teachers and experts dictating what has to be done or taught to a world of individuals having to build their knowledge and skills with the help of mentors from education and healthcare. This is a true revolution which can be done only if education and healthcare are working together with other sectors of the society facing the same challenges....”

How to act to implement this idea? We have to create opportunities for users and providers of health services to meet, to get to know each other and to learn together. We need to connect them and enhance the influence they exert on each other so that the world of monopolies and institutional authorities will be transformed into a world of mutual servants, servants in the noble meaning of the word, or perhaps into a world of partners creating new opportunities for mutual learning and common action.

## **A journey to excellence**

In the healthcare section the discussion concerned the incongruities obvious from the following statement: ”In healthcare we are interested in systemic analyses, in many things that are on the other end or at the end of the line, but, alas, we tend to forget the patient, quality of treatment, etc.”

In this section **Marko Kiauta** presented his view of the Section’s mission, quality in healthcare. Several of the ideas he stressed evoked discussions: ”A person is born, grows and becomes adult. In childhood he needed parents to support and control him, later in life; however, he needs these gradually less and less. The same applies to the society and its various segments, for instance, healthcare. It is simply no longer possible to have control! Quite the contrary, the above-average practitioners – those who are in the midst of life and problems - are creating and establishing new practices to replace the rigid bureaucratic regulations. What we need is making connections and learning through dialogue, in which all involved participate as partners.”

How, then, should quality be achieved in healthcare? Certainly not by looking for mistakes and persecuting people, as this only leads to defensiveness and resistance! We will reach the best people, the best professionals if we acknowledge the results of their work and give them the recognition they deserve, setting on this standards for the rest and encouraging them to learn and develop continuously. Only in this way can we step on the road of quality and start the journey towards the so much desired excellence.

Dušana Findeisen