

Prologue

Learning to change. Perspectives on sustainable development

ROBERT VAN NOORT AND MARTIJN FRIJTERS

The literature about organisation and change is paying ever more attention to the aspect of learning during change. The starting point is then still a change or an organisational change. We see overriding themes emerging worldwide such as sustainable development, leadership, generational learning, corporate governance and diversity which all place the human aspect foremost. Human Resource Development (HRD) as a specialist field is having more and more influence on ideas about working, change and organisation. This volume of *Develop* approaches the development of people as a topic about learning. It is not the changes which sweep over people but rather the people who are driving every development and change. And inasmuch as nature independently causes changes in our climate for instance, it is still always the people who respond to this and try to at least turn such a process to their advantage. In short, the actor-oriented approach is central in this *Develop*.

This issue compiles learning perspectives on sustainable change and development. There are methods and case studies on offer and learning is given wider attention than just learning in organisations. Sustainability is after all also about more than learning in organisations. We have asked scientists and practitioners from different generations for their opinions. From a young, recently graduated university student (Pillen) who carried

out research into the effects of interests to an experienced practitioner who can summarise the essence of his work in one sentence: 'I support people to get closer to themselves by overcoming fear little by little' (Swieringa).

Guest editors Robert van Noort and Martijn Frijters introduce the contributions in this issue.

They briefed the authors based on the following questions:

- Which interaction takes place between the 'actor' and the 'change process' with regard to the actor's own interests and goals in relation to the change?
- How can one 'seduce' actors to make a meaningful contribution to a change process?
- And if such a 'seduction' is successful, how can an actor best create and organise meaning, learning, reflection, and take action?
- How does a change process look that places the human being central, and how does this relate to the dominant logic of 'planned change'?
- And how can knowledge be generated in such a change process?
- How can one recognise the 'undercurrent' of change in an organisation and intervene accordingly?
- What does this imply for the role of change facilitator?
- How do you integrate the perspective of sustainability?

Inspired by the emphasis we placed on learning, people and sustainability, the authors have written their own stories. You should see these questions as a guideline during your reading.

Robert van Noort and *Arne Gillert* describe change as the art of connecting. By connecting personal interests with those of the organisation and setting up common goals on the basis of this, a powerful strategy evolves which leads to the sustainable development of the person and the organisation. They offer a change model to accomplish this. *Pepijn Pillen* has carried out research at Volvo Cars Ghent into how this works. Pillen focuses on strategies of connecting interests and the beliefs underlying successful change.

Lidewey van der Sluis, *Léon de Caluwé*, *Anthonie van Nistelrooij* all present the results of a research into the links between individual change orientation and learning behaviour of individuals. They state that if one specific type of change is needed and the learning and change orientations of the individuals are not in line with that type of change, the management should first pay attention to this misfit before starting the change program.

Martijn Frijters and *Paul Keursten* place the emphasis on investigating different perspectives in order to give shape to a new future. In four case studies it is evident that sustainable development can be given form through reflection and pausing to consider the underlying notions of the actors.

Nancy Dixon describes the stages of development in Communities of Practice. Building relationships, identifying what knowledge to focus on and learning about knowledge sharing practices are strategies for competence development, organisational influence and cross discipline synergy.

In the article entitled 'Change as dialogue: practical knowledge for the single case', *Rombout van den Nieuwenhof* considers changes as linguistic processes. He links together two approaches which are often placed opposite each other in the literature: the design approach and the development oriented approach. This contribution deals with seven types of dialogue with a progressive degree of complexity, describes the characteristic course of these types of processes and the roles of the change facilitators.

Kurt April, *Amanda April* and *Heike Wabbels* research the role of unlearning in the development of healthy organisations. In this article they draw an analogy from the field of criminology, particularly restorative justice within that field.

Jaap Peters closes with a pamphlet against Anglo-Saxon learning and changing which is directed only at the short-term. Inspired by the protest CD by Bruce Springsteen, he makes a case for Rhinelandic learning and changing: Knowably better.

In this issue of *Develop* you will also find four interviews. Those interviewed give a passionate account of their experiences with and their views about learning.

In closing, we would like to thank Luc Verheijen who, with his enthusiastic and involved manner kept us sharply focused on our goal for this issue.

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- **Robert van Noort** is a partner in Kessels & Smit, The Learning Company. He is also president of NVO2, the Dutch association of HRD professionals.
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Epilogue

‘Learning to change: perspectives on sustainable development’

ROBERT VAN NOORT EN MARTIJN FRIJTERS (WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF MARLOES VAN ROOIJ)

In this epilogue, we take a last look at the results of the contributions of guest authors, people who were interviewed and other specialists. What have these shown us about the situation with regard to learning and changing? And what still awaits us? Looking at the total of all the articles, interviews and other contributions, one thing immediately strikes us; this issue of *Develop* is about people. What has been written is all about their learning process, their development and their role in organisations.

This has set us to thinking; The focus in this *Develop* is on the people instead of on the organisation. After all, it is the people who are working within the organisation who learn and not the organisation itself. Herewith, the perspective of the learning organisation is in fact incomplete: the person should be in the centre. We do however find the concept of the learning organisation an interesting one; the ability of an organisation to take advantage of the learning process of its employees so that it can respond to the changes in its context with a kind of meta-directing.

THE STATE OF AFFAIRS: THE RHINELANDIC APPROACH

Our perspective is that learning occurs in people and change in the organisation. In other words, learning, developing and exploring arise from a question or need that people have. That can be fed by a change of the organisation in for instance structures, procedures, systems et cetera; a redesigning of the context to foster and structurally imbed the learning process of people. The focus here is therefore on the development and exploration of what someone is capable of and on the structural support of this so that this can be profited from in the long-term. In the article by Van Noort and Gillert this approach is worked out in a change model and in case studies.

A development that we can see in South Africa fits in very well with this. There are mines which are lying unused at the moment. The starting point for working the mines is: ‘We have a lot in our mines but we will only start taking it out if we know for certain how we can exploit it optimally – as much as possible for as long as possible.’

The approach which we follow here can be termed as Rhinelandic thinking in which the development of talents, the dignity of the person and investing in labour relations are important aspects. This as a alternative angle next to the traditional Anglo-American way of thinking in which resources, maximum return and the exploitation of the person are central (Van Aken & Reynaert, 2004). An impression of characteristics is represented below (figure 1).

A EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE

Referring back to what we wrote above, we propose that change is directed towards the context. And the context must change along with the changing person. These changes (the wishes of the customer, society) are (partly) predictable and you can respond to these by creating new forms of organisation which fit with that change process. Forms which support responding to changes and which stimulate learning with respect to worth. Take note: worth not as a focus but as a starting point. That means starting with individual responsibility, the belief that every individual must make a contribution to the community in terms of sustainability. Then we pass over performance and management thinking in which procedures and systems, which are aimed at control, are central and in which return from training is determined beforehand in order to make the best possible use of human resources. The new perspective brings us to leadership thinking in which revealing vision and direction, principles, model behaviour and individual responsibility take the lead in forming a sustainable society.

Two Thought models	
Anglo-American	Rhinelandic
Minimal state interference	Tripartite agreements
Organisation as support	Organisation as work community
Shareholders value	Labour relations
Economical effectiveness	Social effectiveness
Maximum return	Trust and loyalty
Efficiency	Reliability
Competing	Cooperating with competitors
Management thinking	Leadership thinking
HRM	P&O
Competencies	Talents
Usefulness of people	Worth of people
Legal responsibility	Personal responsibility

Figure 1. Characteristics of the Anglo-American and the Rhinelandic approaches models (Van Aken & Reynaert, 2004: 26)

Van der Sluis, De Caluwé and Van Nistelrooij give an example of research in which this European perspective is formulated: they propose that the learning and change orientation of people in the organisation must be in agreement with the type of change. And when this is not yet the case, then attention must be paid to the differences, and therefore to the people, before the change can be started.

According to us, the Rhinelandic approach offers a perspective on this: invest in the development of the human worth and do not focus on tapping human potential. Create community meaning. That means: thinking based on the individual, the community and the connection between them. In this way you work in service of the community, of society and thereby of sustainability.

We can find a interesting example of this in the contribution made by Boonstra. He describes the CIDA, a university established in the townships. The students have an important voice in the way the university is run and they give something back to their township while they are studying. An initiative which arises from a community with the goal to develop the community in order to eventually have a better chance. Through this, a learning community evolves in the township which is a beautiful illustration of development oriented to human worth. With

this approach, the students create sustainable forms of learning together with their township. It is becoming ever more important to find organisational forms for this. Similar initiatives (and supporting them) are according to us the first step towards this. Another form is the communities of practice. The core idea is that creating learning situations and facilitating learning processes is central. And it is precisely that learning and developing which form connecting activities between people, the organisation and society whereby an investment is made in a sustainable learning society. A model which supports this thinking is the Learning Society Roadmap (fig. 2, Van Noort, 2005). A more detailed working out of the core qualities of the three positions you can see in fig. 3 (Van Noort, 2005).

We – as Europeans – are well on the way to developing a perspective based on the Rhinelandic approach. What we have to offer is: sustainability, development aimed at human worth and community meaning.

**THE DISCUSSION ABOUT LEARNING AND CHANGING:
THE DIALOGUE**

In order to indeed be able to develop the new forms of organising and learning which we have prized so highly in this epilogue, a discussion is necessary. The form which Van den Nieuwenhof recommends for this is the dialogue, according to us a very fit-

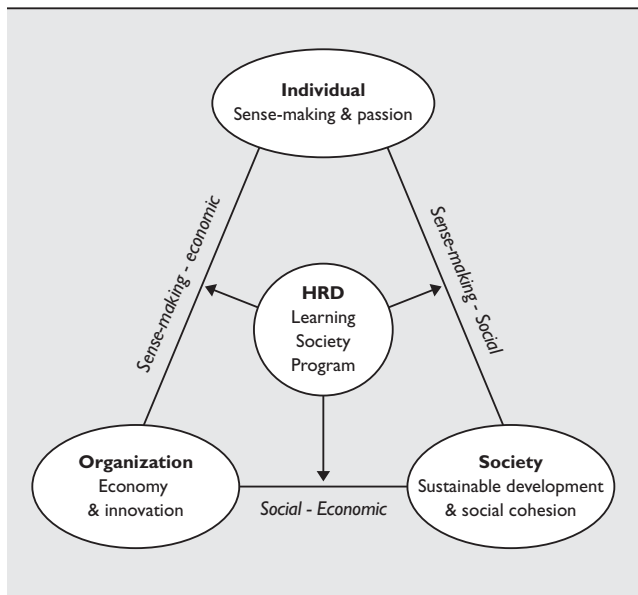


Figure 2 'The IOS-model forms the basis for the Learning Society Roadmap'

ting and refined approach. The examples which Van den Nieuwenhof touches on link up with the form of network organisations. We believe strongly that this organisation form will be one of the future forms in answer to the question as to how learning and developing can be sustainably designed in terms of community meaning. A network is characterised by social ties and also financial ties and the question is how do you make these links so that they become productive. Forms of dialogue which Van den Nieuwenhof describes link up with this. And also the contribution of Dixon can be linked to this. She writes about the communities of practice and their development which, according to her, takes place based on different phases or 'stages'.

Also this development is based on the dialogue, involving each other on the basis of content, social and financial reasons. The three aspects which we already named in the network organisation. In the development of the network form (as organisation, community of practice or learning community), the following questions are always central: who likes to do it (social), who is good at it here (content, expertise) and who is going to pay (financial).

From this point of view, we also see a connection with the article of Peters. He writes about creativity as a form of self-organisation and autonomy. This organises itself in your brain. And how do you now bring the different autonomies together so that a social context emerges? That takes place according to Peters by recognising the 'undercurrent'. The upper current is that which we all see, the current practices. Peters proposes that if you take a good look, you will see people who are in the meantime busy developing new forms, who dare to discover and to value. Think for instance of the younger generations who develop other ways of doing things outside of the upper current of the general 'that's how we do it'. If you understand the newer generations and where they are coming from, well that is a way of getting a perspective of the undercurrent. And once again, dialogue is necessary for this: will you accept from me that I do things the way I now do them? This dialogue works in both directions: this will make it easier for the upper current and the undercurrent to see what the other is doing and this creates room for renewal. The one is no longer facing the other but may stand next to the other. It can also be complementary or perhaps so inspiring that the other takes it over. Old and new can also sometimes be combined into a new approach. In short, countless possibilities for renewal by com-

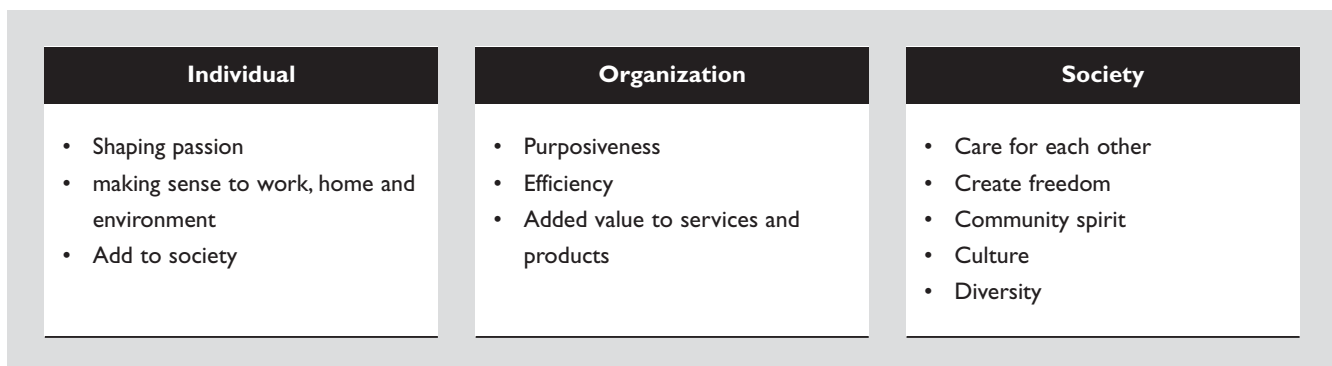


Figure 3 'Core qualities of the positions of individual, organisation and society'

binning the unconventional with the conventional. Frijters and Keursten describe four case studies in which they each time set the perspectives next to each other and thus create room for renewal. Pillen also joins up with this with his article based on generation thinking: interests can be seen as something which reside in human thinking. Give these a place in your own system, your context or network, and you create room for new initiatives.

We make a connection between the contributions in this volume of *Develop* with the Rijnlands perspective and the complementary dialogue. We consider it important because we are searching for new forms of sustainable learning with regard to community sense-making. As Swieringa shares with us: 'I help people mostly to learn to know themselves well.' With this he indicates what is important to being able to function well in society, to being able to indicate what you want, in determining the limits of your autonomy. What is involved is being able to regulate yourself in a context, to direct your own development or your own learning process as a form of social behaviour. Questions which are central to this are: Do you know what you can do? Do you know what you cannot yet do but what you want to be able to do? In short, Do you know who you are and what you want? In order to be able to answer these questions, awareness and responsibility are necessary. Not only for one's own development but also for that of the environment which could stretch from colleagues, the organisation, family and friends to the whole of society. With this, self-directing acquires a social component in addition to the individual aspect: finding a good balance between being oriented to yourself and being oriented to others. (Dirkse & Van Noort, 1998) It is all about knowing yourself, engaging in the dialogue about it and in this way investing together in a sustainable learning society.

WHAT STILL AWAITS US: LEARNING FROM THE BRAIN

Thus far the state of affairs. It is time to look ahead. We are standing on the eve of knowledge development concerning how the brain works and how it learns. Physiological research is expanding further and is able to look ever more deeply into the brain. Nowadays, brain specialists can even see the brain at work 'live' so that more and more insight is gained into which parts of the brain are active for a particular task. It offers new insight into how the brain stores, processes and retrieves information but also about how things are learnt and under

what circumstances. This angle will still give us a number of new perspectives on learning and changing. Such as the recent discovery that the metaphor of a store or shop is not really applicable to the way in which our brain learns: it appears to be a very dynamic process in which there is constant reorganisation and bits of information are continually moved and reconstructed. We also see for instance that certain forms of neuro-feedback exist which are effective in counteracting sicknesses such as epilepsy, autism or neurological damage. Kruse says of this: "If you are capable of confusing the brain, then the brain will go in search of other solutions and thus make new connections." Confusion occurs in interaction with people, environment, changes. Interaction is apparently a driver upon which your understanding develops itself. This is also nicely visible in the article by April, April and Wabbels. They draw an analogy from the field of criminology, in particular restorative justice within that field. A criminologist works with victims or crime perpetrators and helps them to unlearn destructive beliefs, destructive emotions and destructive behaviours before proceeding to embed new ways of 'doing' and 'being'. They examine what can be learned from this field for organisations.

For us this means that learning and changing are becoming less and less planned activities (depending on for instance set course days) and that all kinds of learning methods are more and more at the service of all sorts of interaction. We will become ever smarter in discovering the circumstances in which the brain is most receptive and in the best state for learning.

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